...E OF THE BLACK HILLS

D. LANGE

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THE LURE OF THE BLACK HILLS

"INDIAN" STORIES WITH HISTORICAL BASES

By D. LANGE

Superintendent of Schools, St. Paul, Minn.

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ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX

THE SILVER ISLAND OF THE CHIPPEWA

LOST IN THE FUR COUNTRY

IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., BOSTON

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Three Teton Sioux stalked into the white men's camp. — *Page 35.*

THE LURE OF THE BLACK HILLS

BY

D. LANGE

AUTHOR OF "ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX," "THE SILVER ISLAND OF THE CHIPPEWA," "LOST IN THE FUR COUNTRY," AND "IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH"

ILLUSTRATED BY W. L. HOWES

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THE LURE OF THE BLACK HILLS

CHAPTER I

AT OLD FORT PIERRE

OLD Fort Pierre, on the Missouri River, was in its busy years certainly not a dull place. It was located a few miles above the present capital of South Dakota and in the days of our story was the largest trading-post of the American Fur Company. Pierre Chauteau, the head of the company, for whom the fort was named, took the first steamboat from St. Louis up the Missouri River in 1832.

Sam Benton and his family, consisting of the lively lad, Thomas; Jim, an adopted orphan; little Peter, and their mother, Sara; were never lonesome, although at the begin-

ning of our story, in the spring of 1840, Fort Pierre was nothing but a big trading-post located in the heart of the buffalo and Indian country.

Important trails from the Rocky Mountains, from the great plains east and west and from the mysterious Bad Lands and Black Hills crossed here, and all the furs caught by red and white trappers on the far away headwaters of the big muddy Missouri passed through Fort Pierre. The Indians brought to it thousands of buffalo skins and tons of meat, tallow, and buffalo tongues to barter all for the goods which the traders brought up from St. Louis.

Travelers, government officials, and soldiers bound for the western Indian country, always stopped here. Many other noted men also visited old Fort Pierre. The artist, Catlin, who arrived on the first steamboat in 1832, painted some of his famous Indian pictures at Fort Pierre, and the great Audubon studied here the birds and animals of the plains in 1843.

On the day our story begins, late in April, 1840, the first boat of the season had come up from St. Louis. Numerous Indians of the Teton Sioux who were camping on the plains near by, had come into the palisade. Some were busy in the trading-houses, others watched the work of the white men and black men at the boat landing, and others sat in groups talking and smoking with that calm restful expression peculiar to Indians, showing that they have no duties pressing on them to-day and that they expect none to-morrow.

In the midst of this picturesque life, the Bentons, although not lonesome, were nevertheless unhappy.

"Sara, there is nothing ahead in it," Benton had again told his wife at dinner. "Even now buffaloes are getting scarcer every year, and when they are gone the Indians will leave. Then Fort Pierre will go dead, and the company will move its headquarters to another trading-post far up the river, or even to the banks of the Yellowstone. When that

time comes, we shall all have to go to the new fort or quit the company.

"I wish we were out of the business and out of the country.

"But before I leave this wild country for good, I wish to explore those dark mountains, I have seen so often from the plains and the buttes of the Bad Lands. It ought to be a good country for fur and game, although the Indians say it is bad medicine and a poor country for hunting, but I have never found an Indian, who had been through the Black Hills, nor was any white man ever there.

"There may be gold in those hills, too, and there must be plenty of beavers, for wherever there are streams there are beavers. Sara, let us quit the Company and spend a year in the Black Hills. We shall surely make some fine packs of beaver and there is no telling what else we may find."

In the middle of the afternoon Tom came running home all out of breath with excitement.

"Mother," he burst into the kitchen.

"Mother, Tankaheeta has come back. He's down at the boat-landing. He's been to the Black Hills where father wants to go, but I'm not to tell anybody but you and father. May I bring him home for supper?"

Every small boy worships some big boy as his personal hero, and Tankaheeta was the chosen hero of Tom.

Tankaheeta was one of those restless adventurous Indian youths, who found life in the camp and near the trading-post too tame. He was an orphan, whom Benton had often befriended, and being the only big boy with whom Tom had become intimately acquainted, Tom had in a way adopted him as his big brother.

The young Indian had a year ago started on a hunting trip to the headwaters of the Teton, or Bad River, with a young red companion. Sitting in the shadows of the bare spires of the Bad Lands near the present town of Wall, they often viewed the dark mysterious sky-line of the Black Hills, and the temptation of exploring the Mystic Black

Mountains had at last overcome their superstitious fear of the unknown mountains, which Manitou, a long time ago, had raised up from the broken Bad Lands all around.

Tom had not waited for a reply from his mother, but he brought Tankaheeta for supper.

When the meal was over, and the men had lit their pipes, Tankaheeta was urged to tell of his long journey.

He related that on the way back from the Pahasapa, the Black Mountains, his companion had gone down a mountain valley in search of his horse and had not returned to camp. Tankaheeta had waited and looked for him for a week, but had never seen him again.

"Perhaps a bear killed him, or an elk, or a spirit pushed him down a mountain," he concluded.

Then he took from a pouch several small articles, a few cones of pine and spruce, and a few dried blue flowers.

Tom had all the time listened and looked with rapt attention, but, when Tankaheeta, at

last carefully took three very small brown pebbles from his pouch, even Benton and his friends, Hartmann and Brule, held their breath.

"I found these three little stones in a creek in the Black Mountains," Tankaheeta told them. "You can not break them between two stones, but you can make them flat.

"They feel heavy and they look like the piece of yellow money Mr. Benton showed me a long time ago."

The three white men weighed the little stones in their hands and examined them with keen interest. Neither of them, at first, pronounced an opinion, but each had the same question in his mind.

"Mother," called Benton, "please boil one of these pebbles in the lye leached out of the wood ashes. We want to know what they are."

In the meantime, Benton procured a hammer and beat one of the pebbles into a thin sheet. It was certainly true as Tankaheeta had said. You could not break it, but you

could hammer it flat. Could these pebbles be gold?

The story that there was great wealth of gold in the Black Mountains was one of those vague but persistent rumors that circulated at the camp-fires in the wild Missouri River country. From many points near the Cheyenne and Belle Fourche Rivers, the Black Hills could be seen like a long wavy line of black clouds, standing out sharp against the horizon, and not rarely they merged with the real thunder-clouds that crossed them from the west and poured torrents of rain upon the dark shale bluffs of the Missouri and upon the gray gullied and serrated walls of the Bad Lands.

Benton and his friends had heard these stories many times when they camped on the plains, where they could see Harney Peak, like a distant black cloud, silhouetted against the sky from fifty to a hundred miles away. They had several times tried to run down these stories, but in each instance their inquiries had ended in nothing. Some Indian

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or some trapper who had been in the hills a long time ago had told the story, but the man himself was never to be found. Occasionally a few Indian families camped near one of the outer ridges of the hills and cut a supply of young pines for lodge-poles, but they did not venture far up the narrow valleys and deep canyons among the steep slopes of jagged rocks and gloomy looking forests of pine. They preferred the open plains and the sparsely wooded and sunny valleys of the Missouri and its many tributaries. Moreover, the buffalo herds on which they lived, grazed on the open plains and furnished a more certain supply of meat than the fleet deer and elk that inhabited the glades and forests of the Black Hills.

Now, at last, the story had come direct to the three men, who had felt for some time that there was nothing ahead of them in the fur trade.

There was no doubt about Tankaheeta having been in the heart of the hills. He had never been known to invent any of his stories,

he had been gone a long time, and he had brought not only the three nuggets of gold, but some spruce cones and a few dark-blue flowers, which did not grow on the plains and in the foothills. He said that he had been on "The Peak you see far off," now known as Harney Peak, and that one side of it could be climbed by a man whose heart is strong and whose head does not swim.

"From the high peak," he told his eager listeners, "when the sun shines and the heavens are clear and blue, you can see many white walls of the Bad Lands and, if your eyes are sharp, you can see the flat mountain on which the wild sheep graze among the cedar-bushes. It looks like a dark prairie fenced in by a white wall."

Benton and his friends were convinced that the three small stones were nuggets of gold. Boiling them in strong lye had no effect on them, except that it made them shine a little brighter after they were carefully wiped off.

Would Tankaheeta be able to tell them just where he found the gold? The Black Hills

are a big country, a hundred and fifty miles long and a hundred miles wide.

Perhaps he would not dare to tell them, for even in those days, the Western Indians were getting restless and jealous at the encroachment of the whites upon their lands. The only white people they welcomed among them were the traders. Upon miners and trappers they looked with open or sullen hostility and men who ventured into the Indian country for the purpose of trapping, mining or prospecting took their lives in their hands.

When Tankaheeta had left for the night to sleep in one of the vacant cabins in the fort, the men talked over these points while Tom, and Jim, his adopted brother, fairly a-quiver with interest, listened to their discussion. It was agreed that Benton should try to secure as definite information as possible about Tankaheeta's discovery.

Whether the three friends should risk going into the Black Mountains would depend on the information Tankaheeta would be able and willing to furnish.

CHAPTER II

TANKAHEETA'S STORY

WHEN Tankaheeta was asked about the exact place where he had found the nuggets and about the route leading to it, he was not as communicative as he had been on the first evening. It was only after Benton had assured him that he would not repeat the story to anybody else but to his two friends and the members of his family, who already knew of it, from Tankaheeta's own account, that the Indian lad consented to relate his trip and discovery in detail.

"If the Indians learn that I have told about the yellow pebbles," he began, "and have called many white men into their country, they will be very angry and drive me into hiding into the wild mountains, and if they find me they will kill me.

"But I will tell you and your friends where I found the pebbles. Your friends can keep a secret. It is now several days that I told you all and they have not told anybody in the fort, for if they had, many people would have asked me where I went and what I found.

"You have always been as a father to me since my own father died in the Mountains, and you and your friends carried me in from the prairie when I was famished with thirst, and when the black vultures were sailing above me and I thought I was going to die."

He then told in detail how he traveled into the mountains and how he had at last found the Peak-you-see-far-off.

Not very far from the high peak, perhaps two days' ride, he had camped on a prairie, where the sun shines and no trees grow, but many flowers. On this prairie ran a little stream, he said, which was always clear, never white and muddy like all the rivers and the creeks of the Bad Lands and of the big prairie on the Missouri.

"My pony pawed among the pebbles of this stream one evening," he said in closing his story, "and next morning, when I went to dip water out of the same spot, I found the three pebbles. It was only fifty paces from my tepee and when I went away I left my tepee-poles standing, so you can find the spot if you find the prairie, which runs the way the sun shines in the morning and evening."

When Benton repeated to his friends the story of Tankaheeta and also showed them the sketch of the route which the Indian lad had drawn on a tanned deer-skin, they were ready to take all risks of going into the hills and hunting for more of the kind of pebbles Tankaheeta had brought.

The dangers to be met and the hardships to be endured would be many, but they were all accustomed to dangers and hardships. Life in the buffalo country and among the Indians was not replete with ease and luxury, and there was nothing ahead of them in their present life.

The buffaloes were already becoming less

numerous from year to year. Before many more years, Fort Pierre, as a trade center, would have to be abandoned. The traders would then have to follow the buffaloes westward just as the Indians would do.

"Before many years this whole trade in buffalo skins, tongues and tallow must come to an end," was Benton's conclusion, "the sooner we break away from it, the better. A lucky find in the hills would set us up so we could live like real white men at St. Louis, or back East, and the sooner we make the break the better. Here are my three children, all growing up like wild Tetons. I have to make a break, you two men could stand it a while longer," he concluded, turning to Hartmann and Brule.

The three men planned that they would ask the factor to release them as soon as the next boat came up, when he could hire other men to take their places. Mrs. Benton and little Peter were to go to St. Louis, but the three men and Tom and Jim were to strike out for the mysterious Black Mountains as soon as

the men could be released by the fur company.

But to a part of this plan, Mrs. Benton interposed a strong "No." She was not going to St. Louis. If her husband was going into the dangers of the Black Hills, she and little Peter were going.

"It would be worse," she argued, "to stay at St. Louis and not hear from you for a year or two, than to share all dangers with you. I can ride and I can walk and if the country will support you, it will support me, but if we are to perish it is better we perish together. If you go, Benton, we all go."

This looked, at first, like an unanswerable argument, but when the three men explained to Mrs. Benton how difficult it would be to get into the hills without being discovered and prevented by the Indians, she listened willingly.

"I should want you to come with us," Benton explained earnestly, "but we men and the boys can bear hardships that would be too severe for you and the child. If you go, our first and greatest care will be your safety, if

we go alone our only object will be to get into the hills. To accomplish that we shall shrink at no hardships and we shall fight for it, if we must."

This argument convinced Mrs. Benton.

"I'll go to St. Louis," she said resolutely, "although I know that I can never hear a word from you, nor send a word to you until I see your faces again at St. Louis. And if you do not return, I shall never know what happened to you."

As the boat was expected within two weeks, no time was to be lost. The company had neither boats nor horses to dispose of, and most of the Indian horses that might have been bought were worthless. Moreover, it would not do to arouse the curiosity of the Tetons as to the destination of the white travelers. Traders, as has been told before, were welcome enough, but of explorers, miners, and trappers the Indians were extremely suspicious. If the Tetons suspected that these men were bound for the Black Hills, it would mean trouble, obstructions,

and probably fighting, from the very beginning, and the three whites would most likely never see the tepee-poles of Tankaheeta.

The prospective gold-seekers hit upon a plan of travel, which would not arouse the suspicion or curiosity of either whites or Indians. They would go down the Missouri in skin boats, or bull-boats, as they were commonly known in those days in the buffalo country.

These bull-boats were used by the plains Indians instead of the bark canoes of the forest Indians, for the birch does not grow on the Missouri and its tributaries. Although a bull-boat was almost worthless for travel upstream, it served excellently the purpose of crossing unfordable rivers and of going down streams. If the Benton family and their friends started down the Missouri, it would be assumed by both whites and Indians that they were going to leave the Buffalo country and were bound for St. Louis.

They might have awaited the return of a down-river steamboat, but the next boat was

to proceed to the mouth of the Yellowstone and might not return until late in the season.

They might have built some wooden boats, but the saw-mill of the fort had broken down the preceding winter, so that not a piece of lumber was on hand and they did not wish to ask the factor to let them tear down any of the cabins.

So they had no choice but to leave in bull-boats.

CHAPTER III

DOWN THE MISSOURI IN BULL-BOATS

ALL three of the men had frequently seen the Indian women make these remarkable bull-boats out of very simple material and with the simplest of tools, but now that they were to make three skin boats for themselves, the problem had some difficulties.

The first step, that of securing the buffalo skins, was simple enough for three experienced hunters. When they went to search for the ash poles in the Missouri bottoms, their difficulties began. The poles had to be long enough to make a framework for a big skin basket from five to six feet in diameter and about a yard deep. If the poles were too heavy, they would not bend, if the tops ran out too thin, the shrinking skin would break them.

After a great deal of hard work, which furnished much amusement for the Indian women, the boats were ready to dry in the sun. The skins had been trimmed to big, almost circular sheets and the long wool had been cut off. The poles had been carefully tied together with thongs of rawhide, the hides had been looped over the ends of the poles and had been firmly sewed with rawhide strings to the top hoop, which, so to speak, formed the gunwales of these odd boats.

But even now their troubles were not over. One of the skins in drying snapped several of the ash poles, and if the squaw of Calling Wolf had not shown them how to splice and strengthen the defective ribs they would have had to throw away one of their bull-boats to the general merriment of all the Teton squaws in Fort Pierre.

At last, the three bull-boats were off, with Hartmann, who had had most experience with that kind of craft, in the lead. Benton, his wife, and little Peter brought up the rear,

Brule and Jim rode in the second boat, while Tom was with Hartmann in the *Pathfinder,* as Tom had named the first boat.

The round skin boats proved exceedingly hard to manage, they turned and twisted and danced around with the current and swirls of the turbulent river in spite of anything the inexperienced boatman could do. On the bank stood a crowd of white men, Indians, and squaws, laughing at the difficulties of the boatmen.

"They will soon catch on sharp roots," Calling Wolf mumbled.

"Yes, they will all learn to swim, before the sun goes down," his old squaw predicted, "but they will lose the little boy in the big Muddy River."

"Benton, you're looking the wrong way! Brule look out, a catfish is pulling you up on the mud bank!"

Such were the remarks and parting words sent after the boats.

But the predictions of Calling Wolf and his squaw were not fulfilled, at least, not on

the first day. For every man fully realizing the danger of the river and his own lack of experience was extra cautious. Whenever Hartmann signaled danger, the other two men held their boats with a long ash pole until they felt sure which way to steer.

Each boat carried, besides its passengers, about one hundred pounds of baggage and provisions, but all floated high and were in no danger of shipping water.

When evening came, the men estimated that they had made at least thirty miles as the river ran.

They camped on a high bank, but none, except little Peter had any sleep until midnight, for the mosquitoes kept them awake until the night grew cold. Little Peter slept soundly under one of the tilted boats and was protected by the only piece of mosquito-netting Benton had been able to buy in the trading-house at Fort Pierre.

"This trip reminds me," Hartmann remarked, "of the story of Moses in the Bulrushes."

"You've got the story upside down, Dutch," Brule replied.

"No, I haven't, French," Hartmann retorted. "Moses was in the bulrushes, we're in the bull-boats."

"Well, anyway, Dutch, you needn't figure on any princess kidnapping you," Brule came back. "You're too big and too homely."

It soon became evident even though the men had not run their boats upon any sharp cottonwood snags that they would never reach St. Louis in their strange Indian craft, for when the weather and water are warm, the rawhide softens and within a week or ten days the skin boat is unfit for use.

When Mrs. Benton saw the endless hard work connected with such a journey, she tried to persuade the men to give up the trip to the Black Hills, but none of them would listen to her.

After another bad night of fighting mosquitoes, she tried to induce Tom and Jim to come with her to St. Louis, but she found

that the boys were even more set on going into the unknown mountains than the men. When she could not see what fun the boys could find in such traveling, Tom told her, naïvely, that it was because she had never been a boy and added, "Where father and the men can go, Jim and I can go."

At those remarks, Mrs. Benton had to laugh, although she had been almost in tears a minute ago, and saying that some men and boys she never had been able to understand, the case was not argued again.

At the end of a week, the predicted accident happened to one of the boats. Brule and Jim ran theirs so hard on a submerged cottonwood stump that it became a hopeless wreck. The two men swam ashore, but their baggage and boat were lost beyond recovery. The accident happened just about the mouth of Ponca Creek, which enters the Missouri about ten miles above the mouth of the Niobrara.

Mrs. Benton was much grieved at the accident, but the men declared it would not make

any difference, they would just change their plans a little.

Brule and Jim went into camp at the mouth of Ponca Creek; the others went on without any special mishap to the trading-house at the mouth of the Big Sioux River.

To their great joy, Benton and Hartmann found that they could buy here, of a friendly trader, all the absolutely necessary tools and supplies and all the horses they needed. So they did not go on to St. Louis, because by this fortunate change in their plans they could save about a month of time.

Within four days everything was ready and Benton, Hartmann, and Tom started overland for the mouth of Ponca Creek, while Mrs. Benton and little Peter waited at the Big Sioux for the next steamboat to St. Louis.

Brule and Jim were surprised to see their friends return much sooner than they had expected them.

After a day of rest, the whole party started on their long and dangerous journey to the

Black Hills. They kept a northwesterly direction until they struck White River, which they followed for about a hundred miles. They chose this route, because they did not want to run any chances of not finding water every day, and because the country was but little frequented by Indians.

A few miles from the present small town of Kadoka, they reached the Big Wall of the Bad Lands and entered the most rugged and wonderful part of the Bad Lands, which lie east of the southern portion of the Black Hills in the present State of South Dakota.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE BAD LANDS

THE party had now been traveling several days in this strange region, called Mauvaises Terres by the French traders and trappers.

An artist or a naturalist would change the name of Bad Lands to Enchanted Lands. From bare walls of whitish, gray and pink tinted rocks the sun is reflected as if from long distant lines of mighty forts and battlements.

The whole region was long ago a fine rolling country of woods and prairie, but now rivers, creeks, and rains have cut up the rolling plain until it has become a confusion of buttes and tables, large and small, of rocky valleys and runs and canyons. The large tables and buttes are simply the larger remnants of the old plain, and these buttes and

tables are surrounded by formations so fantastic that an artist or architect has no difficulty to see in them in one place the Gothic spires of a hundred cathedrals, in another the rounded domes of Romanesque and Moorish architecture. Nor does it require much strain on one's imagination to fancy that one looks upon the ruined cities of past generations, of Troy or Nineveh, or some other mart of trade and industry now long silent.

The climate of the region has also changed and is now much drier than it was in former ages. The few larger streams like the Cheyenne and the White River are always muddy, while the creeks of the Bad Lands are real creeks only after a heavy rain. During the greater part of the year they are mere dry runs, dead skeletons of living streams, with here and there a hole containing stagnant water laden with fine white mud and alkali. Even the clear, vigorous streams from the Black Hills, with few exceptions, dwindle away in the arid foothills and reach the

Cheyenne or the Belle Fourche only in spring or during unusually wet seasons.

Springs of clear sweet water, which long ago must have been common are now quite rare and are not easily found by one who does not know the country.

Involuntarily, the mind not versed in the methods most employed in the great workshop and craftrooms of nature thinks of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions as having produced the strange scenery of the Bad Lands, at once beautiful, grand, and sublime, as well as weird and bewildering. But there have been no earthquakes and eruptions, the creeks and streams have quietly carried the greater part of the plain into the Missouri River, which has rolled the uncounted loads of fine mud into the Mississippi, whose lagging current finally lays it down in the Gulf of Mexico.

The old French traders were not artists or naturalists. To them these regions were Bad Lands. The water was bad and often there

was none to be found, there was little or no grass for their pack horses, wood for campfires was scarce, there was no fur, and very little game near the passable routes.

"*Mauvaises Terres,*" they said, and avoided such regions, if possible.

The Benton party did not avoid the Bad Lands, because they were more anxious to avoid falling in with Indians. After they had left the mouth of the Niabrara they had struck out in a northwesterly direction, had crossed the White River about twenty miles west of its junction with the Missouri and were now headed westward. They had traveled a week, generally making their camp on or near the White River. By campers accustomed to clear mountain streams or woodland lakes the water of White River would have been called abominable, because it is always heavily laden with a fine white mud from which the river derives its name. The Benton party were glad they had water, for there had been no rain during several weeks

and the small streams and runs were all dry except for widely separated holes filled with a kind of mud gruel, which Tom and Jim claimed you might eat, but could not drink.

At last, however, the travelers had had to leave the course of the White River and they were now encamped at one of those mud-holes near the present little town of Scenic.

The horses had drunk freely of the mud broth. The men had strained their tea water through a cloth, but the tea nevertheless looked as if it had been mixed with sour milk, and it had a strong alkaline taste.

However, they congratulated themselves on their good luck. Far to the west they could plainly see, like a low black cloud, the dim outline of the mysterious Black Hills, and by to-morrow night they ought to strike the Cheyenne, which like the White River, does carry at least some real water, although it is always muddy. The grass at this camp was poor, but their horses were still in fair condition, and luckiest of all they had not fallen in with Indians, who would almost

surely attempt to steal their horses and who were quite likely to watch for a chance of robbing and murdering the whole party.

They had gone into camp early in the afternoon fearing that they might not find another water-hole before night. It was Brule's turn to guard the horses, while the other two men and the boys made supper and arranged the camp for the night. Brule turned the horses toward a little plain west of the camp, which looked as if it might furnish fair grazing. After an hour he drove the horses back to graze east of the camp, and by his action and the strange look on his face Benton saw at once that something was not right.

"What's wrong, Brule?" he asked. "Seen another ten-foot rattlesnake?"

"I wish I had," replied Brule seriously. "Don't joke, it's something worse than rattlesnakes. There's a bunch of Indians encamped just beyond that low butte. You had better fix up some more bacon and pancake batter. They've seen us, and I reckon

they'll be here pretty soon to pay us a friendly visit. Confound their red hides. I fear we're in for some trouble with that bunch."

CHAPTER V

A VISIT FROM THE SIOUX

A PART of Brule's prediction was soon fulfilled. Three hungry and rather vicious-looking Teton Sioux stalked into the white men's camp. After uttering a short greeting of "Ho, ho!" and after shaking hands with Benton, Hartmann, and Brule, they seated themselves near the small fire at which the two white men were cooking supper.

The Indians knew at once that these white men were not tenderfeet in the Indian country, but they were not so sure as to the business that had brought them here. Their goods were covered with a tent and a piece of canvas, so that the prying eyes of the Tetons could not make out the nature of the packs. However, the men must be a party of free traders, that is, men not connected with the

American Fur Company, or any other company. They had five pack-horses and too large a pile of goods for being employees of one of the companies on their way to Fort Pierre or some other Missouri River point.

Several other things the Indians comprehended at once. These men knew the country and the Indians. Benton spoke their language quite fluently, the goods were properly disposed of and covered for the night; the horses were carefully guarded, and finally the men were not only heavily armed, but they were vigilant, although they seemed entirely at ease. Their guns were within easy reach leaning against a pack of goods, but each man carried in addition a knife and a pistol on his belt. If they had thought of surprising these men by a sudden attack, they knew at once that it could not be done. These men were evidently old-timers in the Indian Country.

The white men, on the other hand, were not so sure about the character of their visitors. Who were they? Neither Benton nor

Hartmann remembered having seen them at Fort Pierre. What were they doing in the Bad Lands? Were they a kind of outlaws not unknown amongst Indian tribes, outlaws who had acquired a bad name amongst their own people and were always ready to rob and even murder defenseless whites? The Benton party had enough goods in their camp to enable these Indians to revel in luxury and feel rich for half a year, a long time for an Indian to think and plan ahead. Benton would have liked to know whether these three were the only men in the Indian camp, however, he asked them no questions, but did the wisest thing under the circumstances. He gave them a good meal of bacon, pancakes, and coffee, and filled their pipes with tobacco. The finest banquet in the best hotel at St. Louis would not have pleased these savage Tetons half as much as this liberal hospitality of a Bad Lands camp. When their pipes were lit, they looked less grim and gloomy, in fact they seemed ready to thaw up, but the whites did not try to draw

them out. Brule took his gun, examined it carefully and mounting his horse remarked in Sioux: "The gray wolves are thick around here. I must be off to look after the horses."

Benton and Hartmann like the Indians smoked in silence, while Tom and Jim amused themselves by seeing how close they could crawl up to some near-by prairie dog colony, before the funny little creatures tumbled headlong into their burrows.

After a considerable time the spokesman of the Tetons asked: "Where are you going?" "Off that way," Benton replied, pointing in a general northerly direction.

"Do you have any rum?"

"Not a drop of it in this outfit."

"Do you want to trade?"

"No, we have nothing we wish to trade," was Benton's short reply.

Then without waiting for the Indians to ask he gave them each a little tea and tobacco.

These presents the Indians seemed to take as a hint to leave and very soon they said: "Ho, ho," and stalked slowly off to their own camp.

"How do you like them?" asked Hartmann. "They're all good eaters. Perhaps they'd be good hunters and gold-diggers, too. Maybe we had better invite them to join our expedition."

"Hang it all!" Benton broke out. "Those fellows are bad medicine for us. I don't like their looks nor their actions. What are they doing here? There's no fur on these mud creeks, and the hunting is no good. I think they are outlaws, in disgrace with their own people, and they would like nothing better than a chance to clean out a small party of unsuspicious or careless white tenderfeet. What is their idea about us?"

"They think," Hartmann answered, "we are free traders bound for some point near the junction of the Cheyenne and the Belle Fourche. I'll wager that they are going to

watch for us along the trail to the Belle Fourche.''

''Yes, if they only would! They could make no better use of their abundant leisure than wait for us at the mouth of the Belle Fourche. It would give them a fine excuse for lazily camping in one spot all summer. The trouble is they're not going to do it. They are going to wait here till we move and then they'll dog our footsteps like bloodhounds, like the hungry gray wolves follow an old buffalo.''

By this time Tom and Jim had stopped stalking prairie dogs, but were taking in every word spoken by the men.

''I'll tell you something,'' continued Benton; ''these fellows intend not to lose us. They are going to watch for a chance at our horses and our packs.

''It's up to us! We've got to find some way of losing them. If we don't, our game is off before it has begun.

''I'm going to talk it over with Brule. You and the boys had better see that the

packs are well covered and fix our beds under the canvas.

"The clouds are coming up over the Black Hills and there is likely to be a storm before morning."

CHAPTER VI

TRYING TO LOSE THE SIOUX

IN less than an hour Benton returned.

"Brule thinks as I do," he reported. "We have to lose those Indians, the sooner the better, and to-night will be as good as any other time. Get everything ready. There'll be no sleep to-night. We'll pull out as soon as we can and take a chance at giving them the slip."

It was not long before Brule brought in the horses.

"We have to get away very quietly, boys," he warned his companions. "The wind is in our favor, but an Indian has ears like an owl, and if those fellows hear any suspicious sounds, they will surely be on our trail again at daybreak."

It was nearly midnight, when the horses

had their packs securely strapped on and each man was in the saddle.

Brule led the way. He had come through this region a few years before and had spent a day hunting big-horn sheep on one of the large table mountains, which is even to this day known as Sheep Mountain.

"If we can reach that mountain," he had told his companions, "we are safe. We can hide in one of its many canyons and depressions as long as we like. The best scout could not find us there without climbing the mountain and searching every part of it."

The party was going in a general southerly direction.

"I cannot tell," Brule remarked, "what part of the mountain we shall strike, but the mountain is about four miles long, and, I think, we are about opposite its northern end."

It was now getting very dark. Heavy clouds came slowly creeping up from the Black Hills in the west. Long, weird tongues

of lightning ran almost across the whole horizon, only in the extreme east a few stars were still visible; and very soon these also were hidden from view.

The distant rumbling and growling of the thunder came nearer and nearer, some sharp crashes echoed from butte to butte and, in the glaring flashes and runs of the lightning, the bare walls of distant tables and buttes sprang suddenly out of the inky darkness again and again.

Of wild life there was no sign. Elk, buffalo, deer, and antelope had withdrawn to localities where grass and water were more plentiful. The little prairie dogs were asleep in their holes, even wolf and coyote seemed to have deserted the country.

The creaking of saddles and the tramping of the horses on the hard and dry ground were the only sounds heard in the intervals between the rumblings and crashings of thunder.

"It's a ghastly night for traveling," observed Benton. "One feels that he would

like to be in some safe hole like the little prairie dogs."

"It surely is a gruesome night for traveling," assented Brule, "but it's a very good night for losing Indians. If it will only end in a good shower! I am not sure that they will not track us to our hiding-place even on this baked and rocky ground; unless a good rain washes away all marks of our route. The wind is springing up, and I pray that it will bring rain."

Tom and Jim had of course taken in every word said by the men, but there was not much talking on this ride. The whole troop moved as silently as possible in order not to betray themselves to the Indians. Moreover, they all felt that it was dangerous to ride through this storm, but it was a danger they could not avoid. They felt sure that on a night like this the Indians would most likely be rolled up in their blankets in the most sheltered place they could find. On a pleasant night, one, if not all of them, would have been watching.

The party had again for a time traveled in silence, when by the glare of the lightning they observed that they were traveling in a valley, the walls of which were gradually drawing together. During the intervals between the lightning both men and horses rather felt than saw their way.

"Father," Tom spoke, after a long silence, "it's beginning to rain. Are we going much farther?"

"I think," replied Benton, "we had better go as far as we can. The chances are that we shall soon come to the end of this valley."

In scarcely half an hour the valley did end abruptly in a narrow rock-walled canyon.

"Here we camp till morning," Benton gave out.

Brule secured the horses by means of ropes and stakes carried for that purpose, while the other four men took care of the baggage and made as good a bed as possible.

As they had found it impracticable to carry tent-poles, they used their tent as a large piece of canvas. The ridge they tied to the

packs as securely as possible and the ends of the walls they secured on the ground by large pieces of rock. On either side and in front of them the gray walls of the Bad Lands rose in steep inaccessible cliffs, jagged, furrowed, and serrate, as if they were but the remains of a slashed and broken mountain.

When the lightning ceased shooting and flashing for a moment, the men felt as if they were prisoners in a dark hole surrounded by walls several hundred feet high.

And now it did begin to rain, first a few big spattering drops, then the drops changed quickly into pouring streams. The silent bare rocks became alive with thousands of gurgling, trickling, and murmuring rills. Out of the dark canyon ahead of them came a noisy stream, and a rushing muddy torrent filled the run at the foot of their camp.

In half an hour the shower had passed. In a very short time the rills and streamlets ceased running and the gray serrate walls became silent.

The lightning still cast its glare here and there and grand peals of thunder ran this way and that way, but the shower had passed to the east and a patch of clear sky was visible in the west.

For some time all five campers had been afraid that the muddy torrent might rise to their bed and tent, now they felt that the danger had passed.

"Let's all go to sleep now," Benton suggested. "We've had a mighty hard day, but I think we've lost the Indians."

CHAPTER VII

ALL HANDS TURN SCOUTS

WHEN the travelers awoke the sun shown as brightly as it ever does on a June day in the Enchanted Lands. Tufts of large bluebells hung here and there from the rocks and from a bit of scrubby cedar a bluebird warbled to his mate.

After a quick breakfast Benton issued his orders:

"Hartmann and Brule had better do a little careful scouting on our back trail. See if you can figure out just where we are and how far we've come, and keep a sharp lookout for our three lost friends. I shall look after the packs. Some of them will need drying.

"You two lads can do a little advance scouting. Follow up this gorge and see if you can find a path or trail to the top of the

mountain. Ride up, if you can, if not, climb up on hands and feet. Then look around for good grass and water and good sheltered camping-places near wood and water.

"If the country looks very good, we may want to stay a week. Our horses are nearly worn out, and we should give our Indian friends plenty of time to finish looking for us.

"Everybody must be back in camp in two hours, sharp!"

Nothing could have suited the two lads better than being told to act as advance scouts. They followed the canyon between the gray soft walls until it ended in a sort of trail that led up the mountain. They dismounted and followed it on foot.

"Look there," Jim cried, pointing to the ground, "a deer track."

"It's a queer deer track," remarked Tom. "It's too wide and too short. Let's get our horses and follow him. We can ride up this trail. Look, it is a regular game-trail. Look at the old buffalo tracks. They're al-

most washed away by the rain, but you can still see them."

The boys went back, mounted their horses and rode about four hundred feet up a very steep trail.

At the end of the trail they came suddenly upon a wide prairie covered with excellent short grass, much better than any they had seen since they left the Missouri River.

"Look to your right," whispered Jim. "What is it? Look at his big horns."

"Man, it's a wild sheep, a big ram. Let's go after him," cried Tom.

The ram was standing like a statue on the edge of the mountain. He was watching the two riders and seemed to be trying to make out what they were.

When the horsemen came within three hundred yards of him, he started across the prairie. The boys urged their horses to a gallop. The ram seemed to stretch himself and ran like a deer, but the horsemen were gaining on him.

Now he disappeared from view behind some

scrubby bushes of cedar and a moment later the two riders pulled in their horses on the brink of a canyon two hundred feet deep.

"Where'd he go?" exclaimed Jim. "He couldn't jump across, it's too wide. And he couldn't jump to the bottom. Where'd he go?"

"He must have found a trail," Tom answered. "I didn't see any wings on him."

The lads dismounted and searched the brink of the canyon, but they could find no place where it was possible for either horse or man to descend.

This was the first experience of the boys with the wild mountain sheep, which is as much at home and is as sure-footed among cliffs and canyons as the red squirrel is among the tree tops.

When the lads became convinced that they had lost the big ram and that they could not find him again, they began to look around.

The sky was clear. A fine westerly breeze floated over the rolling prairie of the moun-

tain, and high overhead fleecy white clouds sailed slowly with the summer breeze.

Far away as if sketched against the western sky lay a long, low line of black. For a few minutes both lads gazed at it in silence. From the south the line rose with one gigantic saw-tooth after another, then it rose with a wavering line until it culminated in the center in an irregular black knob, which reminded Tom of the head of a mountain lion. From the lion's head the wavy line fell away toward the north until it touched the even horizon of the plain.

"The Black Hills, the Black Hills!" both lads exclaimed almost at the same time.

"They're not far," Jim claimed. "Not over ten miles."

"Ten miles, man," cried Tom. "Don't be dreaming Jim. Hartmann said last night we were fifty miles from the foothills. The lion's head must be Tankaheeta's Peak-you-see-far-away. I bet you would ride seventy miles before you come to the top of it."

This point having been settled, the boys remembered that they were to be back in camp within two hours.

"Now, let's do some scouting," urged Jim, "or we shall have to report that we just saw a big mountain sheep and the Black Hills."

About half a mile away they saw a dark grove, which looked like a small forest of cedars and pines.

Tom thought the grove would furnish the best kind of shelter and would be an excellent camp, if water could be found near it.

"Let's run over and look at it," he suggested.

After a run of five minutes they halted once more on the brink of an abyss, which looked a thousand feet deep and a half a mile wide, and as far as they could judge, the pines and cedars grew on an inaccessible rocky ridge.

They followed the edge of the canyon southward to its head, but soon they were halted by another canyon, and again they had to change their direction by a third canyon.

A little way beyond the head of the last canyon, two other canyons, one from the east and one from the west almost met, leaving only a comfortable roadway between.

Crossing this neck of land they once more found themselves on a rolling prairie. But a mile beyond the prairie suddenly changed to a veritable desert of bare knobs, ridges, points, and small canyons impassable for horses. Beyond this desolate stretch lay another grassy table studded with scattered bushes and clumps of red cedar, which near the brink of a very wide canyon thickened to a regular forest.

"That's the place to camp!" exclaimed Jim.

"Sure enough," assented Tom. "If we can get to it, and if it has water. But, Jim, we have to turn back now. Father will be worried, if we are not back on time."

"Look at that stone house, Tom," Jim pointed out. "At least, it looks like a stone house. We can take that in. It's not far from our direction."

But again the scouts were halted by a chasm a quarter of a mile wide, in the middle of which arose a flat-topped barn-shaped rock; which seen from a distance seemed to rise directly from the grassy prairie.

When they were ready to turn their horses campward Tom called under his breath: "Look Jim, look, Indians! Indians on horse-back! What can we do now?"

Jim gazed intently in the direction pointed out by Tom. For just a few seconds his heart thumped and his face flushed, then he laughed.

"This time you're fooled, Tom. They're elk. Elk with big horns on their heads and not horses with Indians on their backs.

"Look again. Can't you see they're elk. They caught our wind and are trotting about with their heads up high sniffing the air."

The elk soon disappeared behind a rise in the ground.

"May be they also dropped into a canyon," remarked Tom. "Everything seems to be sort of bewitched on this mountain. You

think it's close by and you'll just go and get it, but it's always on the other side of or at the bottom of a canyon. If the prairie dogs weren't so small that they can crawl into a hole, I suppose they'd also jump into a canyon."

It was now high time to return to camp, and as neither lad knew very clearly where they had come up on the table, they gave their horses the reins for they had learned to depend on their instinct of direction. The animals started straight for camp stopping only to drink at a water-hole, where to judge from tracks and other signs, elk and sheep and deer, and even some buffalo came to drink.

The men were much pleased with the report of their young scouts, and Brule claimed that the place was surely Sheep Mountain and a good place to hide and to rest their horses.

"Did you find any springs?" asked Benton.

The lads reported that they had found

only one water-hole on the prairie and had seen small streaks of water on the lowlands.

"There will be plenty of water on the mountain after this rain," was the opinion of both Hartmann and Brule, "and when we get up there we'll look for a good spring that has water fit for a Christian to drink."

So it was decided to go into camp on Sheep Mountain to give the horses a rest and plenty of good grass and to give their Indian visitors a chance to become convinced that this party of white men were better plainsmen than the Indians.

CHAPTER VIII

HUNTING FOR WATER

AS Hartmann and Brule had found no sign of Indians on the back trail of the party and had also found the tracks of the horses entirely obliterated by the rain, the party felt that for the present they were quite safe from any dangerous and unwelcome guests.

Taking the packs up the mountain was a laborious piece of work. The sun was blazing straight into the south-facing canyon, hot, vibrating air-currents were running up along the furrowed walls, and both men and horses perspired as if they were working in an oven. In places the trail was still slippery from the night's rain, so that the stumbling horses lost their packs, and much hard work, almost completed, had to be done over.

"A mighty rotten trail," muttered Brule

as he puffed and sweltered under a pack, which had rolled into a gully.

"Be thankful, Frenchy, that the boys found a trail at all. We might have searched the sides of the mountain for a whole day without finding a trail passable for anything else but mountain sheep," Hartmann reminded him.

When at last everything had been taken up and deposited on the grass, the men gave a shout —

" This certainly looks like God's own country," exclaimed Benton. "Fine grass, a delicious breeze. Now for a cool spring, boys! A spring would make our joy complete. A camp at a muddy water-hole isn't much of a camp.

"Hartmann, you have been a soldier in country like this. Find us a spring. The lads can go with you. Brule and I will stay with the horses and packs.

"Mark, boys, we need that spring by supper-time. And you had better keep away from the edge of the mountains. There

might be some Indians in the bottoms. If they should see you, we shall again have some visitors to lose and we might not be able to do the trick a second time.''

Hartmann and the lads started off.

''If we don't find a spring before sundown, I'll eat my shirt,'' the ex-soldier vowed. ''I've found springs in country that looked a good deal worse than this.

''I know where we could find a spring. Somewhere half-way up the steep side where the mountain is sawed off. But we would have to crawl back and forth between the spring and the edge of the mountains like bugs on a bare wall, and any straggling Indians could plainly see us two or three miles away.''

''Couldn't we get our water after dark?'' suggested Tom.

''We might do that, but it would be a mean job and we might have to carry water a mile to a good camping-place, and the horses couldn't get at all to a spring of that kind; so we'll just hunt a while for a better-located spring.''

By this time they had come to the head of a canyon.

"There ought to be some water down there somewhere," Jim pointed out.

"May be there is, but I doubt it," Hartmann replied. "You climb down and look. I'll take a rest here and wait for you."

The boys slid and scrambled down. They followed the zigzag course of the rapidly deepening chasm. The walls grew higher. Large pieces of rock and earth had fallen down from above. A pair of magpies chattered and scolded at them from a bushy cedar, which in some mysterious way seemed glued to the top of a straight wall a hundred feet above them. The lads kept going down. Now they dropped a foot or two at a time, now half a dozen feet, then ten or twelve feet. The walls seemed to be drawing together. Now they stood aslant over a narrow passage so as to shut out the sunlight completely. A few rods beyond, the walls separated again, but the bottom of the chasm suddenly dropped twenty feet. There were signs

of mountain sheep having been at this spot, but of water there was no trace.

"Let's go back," said Tom, as they looked at the wild scene ahead of them. "There's no water in this canyon."

When they reached the top puffing and heated from their hard climb, Hartmann was lying in the shade of a cedar-bush watching some little wild bees delving about in a cluster of pale-yellow cactus flowers.

"These little fellows are having the time of their life," he remarked with a slight German brogue. "They work as if this was the only day they had a chance to work. Just watch them! They cover themselves all over with cactus dust so you can hardly see their shining green hide. I guess they haven't a real hide, but I don't know what to call the skin of a bug. These little fellows remind me of the mice I used to catch in the flour barrels at Fort Pierre."

"Don't you want to know, if we found a spring?" asked Tom with some impatience.

"Yes," drawled Hartmann, without taking

his eyes off the lustrous little bees, "but I know you didn't find any."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I know, because the canyon didn't look right."

"What did you send us down for?"

"Oh, you fellows said you wanted to go along and scout for water and Indians and see things. You've seen a Bad Lands canyon now. Get on your ponies. We'll look at some more canyons."

Soon they came to the head of a second and a third canyon, for the whole table of Sheep Mountain is so dissected by canyons and steep-walled recesses and bays, as one might call them, that a horseman could not ride around the rim of the mountain in a day, although, the whole area of the table is less than four square miles.

At the fourth canyon Hartmann stopped.

"Boys," he remarked, "this long hole looks better. Run down and look it over. I'll wait for you. But you needn't go very far down."

In less than half an hour the boys returned.

"No water," they reported. "Except in one place, where a little of it sort of squeezes out of the wall; just enough to make the rock slippery."

"No good!" their companion decided. "We want a real spring, not an oozer."

At the next canyon the soldier stopped again.

"I think this is our place," he said. "At least it looks good to me. We'll go up a little way. I see a place where we can take our horses right into the canyon, so don't get off."

The boys didn't know just how Hartmann could tell that the canyon looked good, however, they also noticed that this canyon differed from the others they had seen.

Its sides were more sloping, the descent was more gradual and a great variety of shrubs and vines and trees were found in it, while the other gorges had shown little else but red cedar and a few sage-like weeds.

The horsemen followed a dry run, the bot-

tom of which consisted of small broken stone. Arching and leaning branches and trunks of cedars, willows, elms, and cottonwoods interfered some with their progress, while tangles and ropes of bittersweet wound from tree to tree and trailed over the broken rocks.

As the riders turned a sharp angle they came upon two large cottonwood trees. The trunk of the first one was surrounded by broken rock a yard high, which a flood had apparently swept down a side canyon. Under the second one Hartmann halted. "Look here, boys!" he called, "how is this for a camp? Let's hop off and take a drink out of that spring! In this country big cottonwood trees seldom grow far from a spring."

The boys were not slow about getting down flat on their stomachs and taking a long drink after their hard ride and the hot climb in the dry canyon.

"It's great!" both exclaimed. "The best water we ever tasted. There isn't a bit of alkali in it. But it's small. Will it have enough water for all of us?"

"That spring," Hartmann laughed, "would furnish enough water for a company of soldiers and all their horses. Just get busy and clear out the dead leaves and the green growth in it, and you'll see."

After a few minutes the water was clear again and as the lads saw the water bubble up and flow away in a clear little stream they gave a shout.

"See it come up," they exclaimed. "It's not an oozer, it's a real bubbler! Hurrah for Hartmann! He can find springs!"

The three scouts lost no time in getting back to their companions, and by sundown the camp was set up between the two cottonwoods.

A little way below the spring the men built a dam, which very soon had stored enough water for all the horses to drink their fill.

When the stars peeped into the canyon, the men rolled up in their blankets and soon fell asleep to the lisping of the cottonwood leaves, while the horses were contentedly feeding on the grassy slope at the head of the canyon.

CHAPTER IX

SUNDAY ON SHEEP MOUNTAIN

IN some mysterious way a sleeping man remembers when he has to get up. Since the Benton party had left the Missouri River they had always stirred at sunrise so that they might travel during the cool part of the day.

On the first morning at the spring the men, as well as the boys, slept soundly until the sun was high enough to peep over the edge of the canyon.

Only Benton, the responsible leader of the party, awoke at sunrise. Where was he? What birds were those singing? The familiar song of the western meadow-lark had always called him with its cheery clear music which Brule had interpreted as saying, "Where did you see Marie?" to which Hartmann had promptly added the advice: "Better forget

her, French. Unless the Indians in their own cordial manner escort us out of the country, you won't see any Marie for a long time and she'll be married when you do see her again.'' Thereupon Brule had shaken the big ex-soldier and called him a blasted prosy Dutchman, who only cared for beef and bugs.

All this flashed through Benton's mind as he listened a minute to the meadow-lark singing on the rim of the canyon. But with the notes of the lark mingled the simple trill of the song-sparrow and the sweet warble of the bluebird, while a pair of long-tailed magpies, sitting on the cottonwood, were at first noisily talking over the new arrivals, and then gathered enough courage to alight on the tent, from which they dropped to the ground and curiously examined the camp-site and the packs.

''You are welcome to anything you can find and carry away,'' thought Benton, and dropped off to sleep again.

When he awoke the second time the sun was touching the gable of the tent and the

shadows of cottonwood leaves were playing on the canvas.

"Get up, get up!" he called, "the whole bunch of you! Get up, you Mountain Scouts! Where is that spring you promised to find?"

The boys sat up and began to rub their eyes.

"We found it, father," drawled Tom, "sh—sure we found it."

"Oh, Tom, wake up," Jim nudged him. "You're sleeping with your eyes open."

"What day is it," asked Hartmann, "and what's the program for the day?"

"If my figuring is right," said Benton, "it's Sunday."

After some dispute and after counting up the days since they left the mouth of the Niobrara all agreed that it was Sunday.

"We'll keep Sunday," Benton decided, "but we must all get up right away, or the fine day will be much too short. You irresponsible fellows have already missed the finest bird concert I have heard since we left the Missouri."

Brule went after the horses, while the rest of the party made breakfast.

"Wonder if they are there?" he said to himself. "I think we were a little careless in leaving them unguarded. It would have been a fine chance for some redskins to drive them off."

But the horses were there. They neighed a cheerful greeting to their keeper as if they knew that this morning he would not place packs and saddles on their sore and tired backs and would not swear at them in bad French, while he tightened the straps.

"Come on, boys," he returned their greeting, "have a drink of real Christian water with your Sunday breakfast. No more of the heathen alkali stuff."

And the horses acted as if they had understood his words, for no sooner had he slipped off the tethers than they all trotted down the canyon and drank their fill at the clear pond below the spring.

"The first time, French," the ex-soldier jested as the horses filed past the camp-fire

back to the prairie, "that we've stopped at a decent camp for man and beast. I'll see you doing penance in purgatory for the rotten broth you made us drink on the White River."

"Yes, I'm sure, you'll see it, Dutch," Brule came back, "for you'll be there doing time for the rotten jokes you've been dishing out and the lies you told about the twelve-foot rattlesnake you saw in Missouri."

"Just mind your own business a bit and see that you don't burn that corn-cake or I'll put a rattlesnake under your pillow to-night."

The Sunday morning breakfast at Bighorn Spring differed from any the adventurers had eaten on the trip.

It included the luxuries of coffee, sugar, and real corn-bread, and nobody was in a hurry.

The dewdrops were still glittering on the bushes shaded by the high wall of the canyon, but the leaves of the tall cottonwoods glistened in the sunshine and whispered and fluttered in the gentle breeze. The meadow larks were still whistling and a bluebird and

a pair of turtle-doves came down to the spring to drink.

"I bet," Brule remarked, "the birds and the horses know it is Sunday."

"Nonsense," argued Hartmann, "they know where they can get a drink, but they don't carry an almanac around in their heads."

"Hartmann, you haven't a grain of romance in your make-up. You're just a plain pig-headed Dutchman. Please hand me another of your Johnny-cakes."

The big German complied without pursuing the banter any farther.

After breakfast Benton proposed that they all take a stroll to explore the mountain; and as they did not expect to return until rather late in the afternoon each carried a canteen of water, for they knew that good springs were scarce on Sheep Mountain.

Benton and Brule followed a game trail toward the south end of the mountain, while Hartmann and the boys sauntered leisurely down the rim of their camp canyon in a mood

and manner which travelers in a wild country can enjoy only on a perfect summer Sunday.

The big man, whom his friend had bantered for not having a grain of romance in him was soon induced by his love for small life to sit down near an ant-pile. The two boys, of course, did likewise.

"What kind of ants are they?" Jim asked, noticing that they were strange to him.

"I call them race-track ants," replied Hartmann. "They always make a clearing of bare ground around their homes. It looks like a race-track, but how they make it and what it is for I could never find out, but I think it keeps the prairie-fires from their nests.

"Would you like to see them fight? They are great soldiers. Just put your hand down, where they are the thickest."

"Oh, no!" the boys cried, fearing some trick, "you do it."

The man gently pressed his hand on a lively mass of workers, and hundreds of the little

red soldiers clung viciously to his hand and fingers.

"It doesn't hurt any," he remarked with a smile. "I just like to make the little fellows mad."

The mass of ants grew very much excited. Again the man pressed his hand gently on the army of mad little soldiers. Then he shook off the insects and held his hand close to Tom's face.

"Smell it," he said, and Tom fell back as if he had sniffed at a bottle of ammonia. "That's formic acid," Hartmann added; "they try to put that in their bites to make them smart. All ants have it. Let's go now, they are coming across the race-track to fight us."

Man and boys walked across the short grass and sat down in the shade of a yellow pine, which grew on a gentle slope above an abrupt wall.

On the broken hillside near them a group of the most showy flowers of the Bad Lands was displayed in all its glory.

"Look at the lilies of the field," Hartmann mused.

"What are they?" asked Tom. "Are they lilies?"

"The soldiers call them Mexican poppies," Hartmann replied as he bent over one of the tall plants and watched a wild bee alight on the large snow-white petals, bury itself for a moment in the yellow anthers, run over the odd central column of bright purple, and take flight to another flower.

"Let's take some to camp," suggested Jim.

"No, let them grow," Tom returned. "They'd only wilt, but if mother was at camp we'd pick some, for she would take care of them."

Then all three gazed toward the west in silence. There lay the Black Hills like a long, dark and forbidding barrier.

"They got Benton," the man said to himself. "They got me, too; sort of charmed us all. Do you see that roundish peak, boys?" he continued in a louder voice. "That's

Tankaheeta's Peak-you-see-far-away. We'll have to climb it. No white man has ever been there."

"We'll go with you," both lads volunteered enthusiastically. "How high is it?"

"Perhaps ten thousand feet. It looks as if we were within ten miles of it, but it must be seventy miles as the crow flies."

They arose and walked toward camp. The boys' companion seemed to be lost in thought and lowly hummed a song to himself.

"What is it you are singing?" Tom asked him.

"It's a German song, called the Shepherd's Sunday Hymn. My mother used to sing it, when I was a small boy in the Black Forest. I remember the words, but you can't make any English out of it.

"'Das ist der Tag des Herrn,
Ich bin allein auf weiter Flur.'

"But it's no use, the words won't turn into English."

Then they returned to camp in silence.

CHAPTER X

AT THE FIRST CAMP-FIRE

THAT Sunday night the men sat long around the camp-fire.

They had found only one other trail, where horsemen might ascend the mountain, besides the one on which they had come. They had cautiously scanned the broken bottom-land east and west of the mountain and had discovered no sign of Indians or other human beings, so they felt entirely safe from intruders. They closed both trails with piles of cedar-brush so that their horses could not escape from the mountain.

In their camps along the White River they had never built more than the smallest cooking-fire, which was put out as soon as the meal was cooked. At most of their camps wood was scarce, and where wood was abundant

they had put out their fire as soon as possible for fear of attracting some wandering Indians.

At the Bighorn Spring they had plenty of wood and felt entirely secure, so Tom and Jim were allowed to build as big a camp-fire as they pleased. And the boys, in true boy fashion, had worked hard on the job they were not compelled to do. They had dragged together a large number of dead cottonwood branches and they had cut and gathered a great mass of red cedar that hung like gigantic stag-horns on the rims of the canyon.

Now the fire filled a short stretch of the canyon with a weird red glow, and whenever the flames died into a mass of glowing embers the boys threw on some more logs and shouted with joy as a great shower of red sparks rose like a column of fire almost to the rim of the canyon and to the top of the big cottonwood.

The men, during most of the evening, sat and smoked in silence, for the grandeur of wild places makes men silent. Moreover, the thoughts of each man had wandered far away;

to the wooded lands and streams of Ontario, to the Black Forests on the Rhine, and to St. Louis on the great river, where Benton had sent his wife and little son.

Would he ever see them again, Benton asked himself. The danger and difficulty from which they had just escaped, were only forerunners of what they should expect to meet as soon as they left the wild seclusion of their mountain canyon. The Indians they had luckily eluded would surely tell the story of the mysterious disappearance of five white men to all their friends. News spreads very quickly among savage tribes and Benton felt quite sure that for a year, at least, every camp of Teton Sioux would be looking for signs of the lost white traders.

Could they continue to outwit hundreds of Indians who were scouts and hunters by birth and instinct?

If they did not, could they ever risk an open fight? Even if none of their own party was wounded or killed, a fight was likely to wreck

their plan and compel them to get out of the country as quickly as possible. If any Indian was killed or wounded, the Sioux would follow their tracks like hounds, who run a hot trail till they drop of thirst and exhaustion, or till the game is brought to bay.

The fire cast a lurid glare on a column of rock close by.

"Whose statue is it?" asked Hartmann, breaking the silence.

"It's George Washington with his wig," explained the imaginative Tom.

"Not a bit of it," objected Brule, "it's a monk in cowl and hood. Can't you see it? I've seen him all evening."

"Boys," Benton broke in, "the last log is on the fire. You will have to get some more wood."

The lads felt their way up the dry run of the canyon.

"Look, Jim," whispered Tom, as both started back dragging some dead boughs, "look how clearly you can see Father and the

two men. Heavens, I'll never build a fire when I'm in camp at night. Indians could crawl up and see everything and fill you full of bullets and arrows, when, looking away from the fire, you couldn't see a thing.

"Look, Jim, Father and the men at the fire look just like Daniel Boone and his sons in our old history."

For a while the fresh wood sent up a new blaze. Then the flame died down to embers and the red embers turned into white ashes. The canyon was a dark, gloomy chasm, but the stars peeped down from the deep blue arch of heaven and their light flickered in the gently bubbling spring and was reflected from the quiet pool.

"Let's go to bed," Benton suggested. "We had a beautiful Sunday, and to-morrow we have plenty of work."

Very soon the camp was silent. Only the little stream from the spring trickled and tinkled away into the deep and narrow chasm below, while a lone cricket chirped its song from its hiding-place on the wall. The fire

was dead and the canyon lay like a dark trench cut into the mountain.

Over the black chasm the procession of the stars rose and set, and the stars have always been symbols of hope.

CHAPTER XI

CAUGHT IN A CLOUDBURST

THE only members of the expedition that really rested at the Sheep Mountain Camp were the horses. They were allowed to roam about at will, except the saddle-horses, which were kept picketed ready for an emergency.

"Look after your horses," Benton gave out, "and the horses will look after you when you get into trouble. A man who has lost his horse in this country has lost his best friend."

Two or three times a day the horses came to the pool to drink, and as the grass was better near the head of the canyon than anywhere else on the mountain, none of the horses, even if they were given a free run, wandered very far from camp. During the hottest hours of the day they all enjoyed the

luxury of standing in the shade of trees and bushes near the head of the canyon, where they could brush off the flies which annoy man and beast in the wilderness as much as in the neighborhood of human settlements.

The men were glad of a week's rest, but there were many things to do in camp. The saddles and packs needed repairing, the supplies needed looking over; and their adventure was now so far under way that they could to some extent gauge its dangers and make plans to meet them.

"We're on the wrong trail," Brule voiced his opinion. "We shall never get into the hills undiscovered from this side. We should have tried to get in from the west. Fewer Indians inhabit that side of the mountain, and if we ever do get into the hills from this side, we'll never get out again."

"Brule, you're talking in a pipe-dream," retorted Hartmann. "Can't you see that we are only fifty miles from the foothill now, and that we would have to travel two hundred miles to get in from the west? And not one

of us knows a thing about that route. You might just as well give up the whole trip as try to go around the south end first and then get in from the west side."

"And it's a great lot we know about this part of the country," retorted Brule.

"We have Tankaheeta's account of it, and we have his map."

"That piece of deerskin you call a map? I call it a rag, Dutch. It's just a dirty rag with some charcoal scrawls on it."

"All right, French, get mad and call it a rag. It shows us the stream we are to follow into the mountains, it shows the high peak and the creek on which Tankaheeta camped, and I'll take very good care of the rag; you needn't look at it again."

"Now, boys," Benton interposed; "we're on a knotty job and it's no use quarreling about it. Let's put our heads together and figure out how we can best go ahead with it.

"As for me, don't talk about giving it up. I'm not going back to St. Louis and tell my wife that I couldn't get into the Black Hills

after I have dreamed and talked about them for ten years.

"You fellows can go and tell the girls at St. Louis that you started for the Black Hills, but that the going was bad and three Indians gave you a bad scare."

While such discussions were going on at camp, the two lads were generally away on some joyous exploring trip.

One day they went to the prairie-dog town, another they put in on trying to find a hawk's nest. One day they hunted for a big rattlesnake, the oil of which Brule said was the best thing for rheumatism, although, Hartmann scoffed at what he called "Brule's superstition," claiming that lard or bacon-fat or buffalo-grease, or any kind of grease, was just as good as rattlesnake-oil.

Brule claimed that porcupines had barked a good many of the scattered pines that clung to the canyon walls and steep slopes of Sheep Mountain. Hartmann held that porcupines couldn't live in the Bad Lands and, of course, Tom and Jim were without formality elected

naturalists of the party and set out to find the animal that barked and killed the pines. Moreover, the boys themselves found some tantalizing problems.

Where did the large white-winged swifts build their nests? They were always soaring and twittering high over the canyons and deep bottoms. Where did they sleep at night and where did they rest? The lads never flushed them from a bush or from the grass, where the meadow larks arose every few hundred yards.

Where did the big turkey-vultures or buzzards make their nests? The lads had often seen a few of these birds on the Missouri, but here on Sheep Mountain a whole flock was at home. No sooner did boys or men climb out on some exposed ridge or point, than the big black vultures sailed back and forth over them, at times coming so close that the lads could plainly see their eyes, their bare red heads, and their rather small feet closely pressed to their bodies, for vultures

do not have the powerful grasping talons of hawks, owls, and eagles.

From the prairie-dog town Tom came back with a good story on Jim. The younger brother had set his heart on having one of these funny little fellows for a camp pet.

"I know he isn't a real dog," he admitted, "because he eats grass like a woodchuck, but he looks and hops about like a small pup and he can sit up straighter than you can ever teach a pup."

On the appointed day the lads started for the prairie-dog town. When the two hunters came within sight of the village of the little rodents a sharp barking could be heard, which sounded as if the whole colony were giving sharp warning about some grave danger.

As the boys came nearer, the barking increased, while one little upright watcher after the other seemed to turn a somersault on his small sentinel mound and vanish into his hole.

"I'll fool him all right," Jim remarked with confidence as he carefully adjusted a

horsehair snare over the hole of his selected pet.

The snare was attached to a twelve-foot pole, the farther end of which the hopeful prairie-dog catcher took in his hand as he lay down on the grass to watch for his opportunity.

"They always come out again, pretty soon," he asserted.

In about ten minutes the little creature did put his head out just enough to look around, but before Jim could jerk his pole, the prairie-dog was again safe down in the earth.

"Hear him cussing," Jim laughed. "He doesn't bark any more like a squirrel, he's mad all through his yellow skin. What's he saying? Listen: 'Whittle—whittle—whittle whittle—oo—whittle oo—whittle—oo.' "

"He's scared out of his wits, that's what he is saying," Tom answered. "He'll not come out again for a long time."

"I don't care," Jim replied very determined. "I have more time than he has and I'm going to stick, till I catch him."

Tom strolled about here and there, he watched the race-track ants and he hunted for Indian arrow-heads at a point where long ago some arrow-maker had probably had his camp. Finally he lay down a hundred yards behind Jim so as not to disturb his brother's game.

Jim lay very quiet, and Tom wondered at his unusual patience.

"I didn't know he wanted a pup that bad," he thought to himself.

Suddenly Jim jumped up; wildly swinging his pole about his head. Tom ran over to him, "Where is he? Didn't you get him?"

And then Tom rolled over and over on the grass laughing, for he saw that Jim had been asleep and had been dreaming that he was pulling a big catfish out of the Missouri at Fort Pierre.

"Come on, Jim, let's go home for supper," he said when he could talk again. "You can come back and catch him to-night."

"You needn't be nasty about it," Jim re-

torted. "You know well enough that prairie dogs don't come out at night.

"I'll come back and dig him out to-morrow, that's what I'll do."

But on the next day Tom persuaded his brother that a prairie dog wouldn't be worth much as a pet after you got him.

"He wouldn't follow you," he argued. "You would have to carry him with you in a cage. He isn't a dog, he's like a rabbit or a squirrel or a woodchuck.

"And you couldn't dig him out. Hartmann says they go down ten feet or more, so that the wolves and coyotes can't dig them out, even the badger can't dig them out.

"Leave the pesky little tail-wigglers and let's go and explore that deep canyon on Cedar Point."

Jim was willing to explore the canyon, Buzzard Canyon, the boys called it, for they had always found one or more of the big black birds sailing over it.

In the strange forest of old cedars the lads

discovered several cotton-tail rabbits and a pale little chipmunk.

"There must be a spring here," Jim maintained, "or these animals wouldn't be here. They can't make a trip of two miles every time they need a drink of water."

With the idea of discovering a new spring the boys scrambled down a hollow where milfoil and other flowers were in bloom amongst dead and gnarled old cedars.

"You'll soon see that spring," Jim remarked. However, his hopes were rudely disappointed, when both lads halted suddenly on the brink of a chasm with a sheer drop of two hundred feet.

For an hour or more the lads continued their search for a spring among the cedars and scattered pines. It was all in vain, for every hollow and depression, which looked as if it ought to be the bed of a spring or brook, ended in the same big chasm with steep walls and a rough rocky bottom. The June sun glared on walls and bottom, not a drop of water nor a green thing was visible; the big

pit might have been the kiln of a vanished race of giants or evil spirits; and the lads were very glad that they could quench their thirst from their canteens.

There is little doubt, however, that in a way Jim was right in hunting for a spring or a brook on Cedar Point. A long time ago, before Sheep Mountain became a mere remnant of a great rolling plain, brooks and streams most probably flowed in the very hollows where the boys looked for them and the thickets of cedar and pines are probably mere relics of a great forest that once covered the plain.

It was quite late in the afternoon when the lads at last descended into Buzzard Canyon. It was their plan to return to camp by a short route. Buzzard Canyon they figured must lead them into the same bottom into which Big Horn Canyon emerged; and the distance from camp by that route could not be more than a mile.

The lads had not gone far, before they almost regretted having started. The chasm

grew so narrow and zigzagged about in such a fantastic manner that they felt as if they were lost in a weird, unnatural maze.

Now they had to jump half a dozen feet, now they had to crawl past an immense rock which seemed ready to fall into the canyon any moment. Below this rock came a drop of fifteen feet, but the boys were in the daring mood and they scrambled and dropped to the level below.

Now, however, they found themselves in serious trouble, for the next drop was a sheer fall of more than twenty feet.

"We can't jump that," Tom cautioned. "It would mean some broken bones. We must go back."

They tried to go back, but the soft rocks crumbled when they tried to pull themselves up. Again and again they tried. It was impossible, and with horror they realized that they were imprisoned in the canyon and could neither go backward nor forward.

"We must wait here," they concluded, "till Father and the men come to look for us.

They will come to look for us, when we are not in camp for supper."

They ate the rest of their lunch and almost emptied their canteens, for waiting to be rescued was a very tedious game. Another half-hour passed and the canyon seemed to be getting dark.

"Father should soon be here," Jim said. "Listen, I think some one is coming down the canyon now."

But this hope proved a cruel mistake. In their eagerness for exploring, the boys had not observed clouds gathering in the west. Just now a sudden gust of wind had loosened some rocks and sent them rattling into the depth.

In less than a quarter of an hour, the rain was falling in streams and a muddy torrent began to rush over their feet.

"Jim, we must get down!" Tom exclaimed, "or the torrent will sweep us down and drown us! Hurry up, Jim, rip up your overalls!"

In a few minutes the lads had cut their

"Slip down! I'll come right after you!" — *Page 97.*

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overalls into strips, and had twisted and tied the trips into a rope.

An old stump was caught fast in the canyon. "Slip down!" Tom urged, as he tied the rope to the stump. "I'll come right after you!"

Jim landed safely, but the rope slipped when Tom was half-way down, however, the torrent of mud broke his fall. He was on his feet again.

"Come, Jim, hurry!" he exclaimed. "We'll be drowned if we wait a minute. Run, or swim, but get out!"

It seemed a long race with a roaring torrent of mud around them, but at last the lads gained the level bottom, out of breath and looking like big lumps of mud. They climbed to a high spot and looked back. A wall of muddy water, man high, came rushing down the canyon with the roar of thunder.

Had the lads lingered a few seconds longer, they would have been miserably drowned.

Half an hour later they reached camp. The rain had passed and Brule was just start-

ing a fire. He stopped as he saw the half-naked and bedrenched lads come up the canyon.

"Oh, Benton! Oh, Dutchy!" he cried. "Come back! You needn't go after the lost kids. Come back and look at these mud babies!"

CHAPTER XII

OUT OF HIDING

THE week of concealment had ended. Never did boys have a more glorious time of exploration and adventure than Tom and Jim during the week the Benton party spent on Sheep Mountain. The men had put everything in shape for making a dash to the mysterious mountains, toward which their eyes had wandered every day. The horses had healed all their big and little sores and there was no longer a slow or listless animal in the drove.

Of Indians, neither boys nor men had seen a track or sign of any kind. The party had so completely succeeded in hiding themselves that they had felt as if they were the only people on earth. All were in the best of health and the best of spirits.

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"Now for the mountains, boys," exclaimed Benton as he gave the word, "Go!" on the second Monday morning after their arrival at their hiding place.

The rule of no shooting and no hunting on Sheep Mountain had been absolutely adhered to and the wild animals had grown very tame. Elk and antelope had learned to graze with the horses and the small bunch of buffaloes, containing two cows with their little brown calves, stood and looked like tame cattle, when the pack-train passed their water-hole. A bunch of sheep, containing several ewes and lambs, were peacefully lying down on the edge of a canyon, while the big old ram, that Tom and Jim had chased a week ago, seemed to be standing on guard.

"What a fine picture!" Benton remarked, as the magnificent animal rather nervously turned his head and displayed a full view of his great curved horns. "He surely is a regular battering-machine of muscles and horns."

"Oh, you should see two of them fighting,"

Hartmann added. "A bull fight between two buffaloes is a tame affair as compared with a battle between two wild battering-rams."

The herd of elk which had given Tom a scare a week ago were grazing to the right of the trail. For a while they all stood with heads erect and gazed at the strange procession, then they slowly approached the pack-train impelled by the natural curiosity of wild creatures, until they had come within easy gun-shot range, but no gun was fired.

"Look out for the Indians," Jim teased. "Look out, Tom, they're going to capture you!" and Brule could not refrain from telling both boys that by this time all the animals on the mountain had heard what terrible hunters and animal-catchers the "mud babies" were.

"Take it from me," he ended his remarks, "that alderman in the prairie-dog village that you tried to catch with a fish-pole has spread your fame. The elk are coming to say good-by to you.

"Hear those prairie pups hollering? I

venture the alderman will soon come hopping along to see you off."

"Well, I'll be stung," broke in the taciturn Hartmann, "if the beasts aren't going to see us off. Those fool elk act as if they were going with us to the Black Hills."

The horses, that a week ago labored and strained and stumbled as they climbed up the slippery trail to Sheep Mountain, descended the dry trail without trouble.

It was with real sorrow that the whole party gave a last look over the rolling prairie and the canyons and strangely carved walls of Sheep Mountain.

To-day the buffalo, the elk, and the antelope no longer range on Sheep Mountain. The last big-horn were seen only a few years ago, but the canyons, walls, and chasms and the rolling prairie are the same and are as wild and weird and beautiful as in the days of Audubon and old Pierre Chauteau.

The funny little prairie dogs still sit and chatter on their mounds and flip their funny short tails as marks of emphasis to their

scoldings. The meadow-larks are there, and the bluebirds; and the tireless canyon swifts and the great black-winged vultures are still sailing over Cedar Point.

Pines and cedars still fringe the canyons and chasms and gather in small thickets and groves, where cottontail, chipmunk, and porcupine find a home away from the abode of men.

But best of all, the spring in Big Horn Canyon still flows sweet and clear, and one who has ever pitched his tent under the cottonwoods and cedars close by, will forever remember the fairy fountain, the sunshine, the echoing thunder, the big white poppies, and the wild rocky chasm of Sheep Mountain in the Enchanted Lands.

And his prayer will be that this and other regions in the Enchanted Lands may be preserved to the Nation, so that our children and children's children may view the great work of the Lord even as the old explorers and ourselves have been blessed to behold it.

When the Benton caravan had turned the northern spur of the mountain, they directed their course northwestward. In the distance to their left, sharply outlined against the sky, arose the mystic mountains, all around the travelers stretched the parched and sun-baked hummocks and buttes, runs and little plains of the Bad Lands. Their trail led along one of those intermittent water-courses known at the present time as Indian Run.

"We might as well follow its general direction," Hartmann suggested. "It must lead to the Cheyenne, our next goal, and after we have struck the Cheyenne, we must find Rapid Creek. The course of that marks our trail into the mountains."

The old question now again confronted them: Would they be able to enter the mountains without being discovered by the Indians? The success of their adventure depended on this.

"Why not travel at night?" Brule suggested; but Benton and Hartmann convinced him that they had to continue to move by day

at least till they had found Rapid Creek. However, all agreed that they should go forward with as much caution as the size of their train permitted.

"You lads," Benton told the boys, "might ride ahead and look sharp about you. Keep within sight of us and come back or signal to us, if you discover anything suspicious. If all goes well, we should be safe in the mountains in three or four days."

The boys rode ahead cautiously. They peeped carefully over bare, rocky ridges, or nosed slowly around the projections of low buttes. The country had the appearance of a typical Bad Lands' bottom. A thin covering of grass grew on the lowest level stretches of soil. Bunches of the sky-blue foxglove, one of the showy flowers of the Bad Lands, and patches of pale yellow cactus stood out like splashes of bright color on a gray canvas; while the bare rocky ridges were studded with striking white and pink flowers, which Hartmann called rock-lilies.

A botanist would have recognized the plant

as a large stemless evening primrose. Most of the evening primroses east of the Great Plains produce a tall stem and open their flowers only toward evening, but this striking rock-lily could probably not draw moisture and food enough out of the crumbling rocks to produce a high stem, so its petals look as if they were painted on the rock. The eastern primroses invite as their guests the moths of late afternoon and evening, but those insects do not find a congenial home among the treeless and sun-baked rocks and walls of the Enchanted Lands, so the rock-lily displays its beautifully tinted petals to the sun and invites the light loving insects of broad daylight, while it protects itself against the parching hot winds by not carrying its flowers aloft on tall stalks.

Of animals the boys saw but little. A few of the little clownish prairie dogs sat scolding on their mounds here and there, wherever the grass and the digging was good; but in those days prairie dogs never became so very numerous, because the little creatures, that

seem to lead such a care-free life, in reality have many enemies against which they must be continually on the alert. Wolves, coyotes, and foxes snatch them up whenever they find them away from their holes, and hawks, owls, and eagles pounce upon them out of the air. It is on account of the fear of their numerous enemies that they seldom venture far from their underground castles, and we are not sure but that the burrowing owl and the rattlesnake even take the young prairie dogs out of their holes.

Of big game the lads saw nothing but the bleached skeletons of elk and buffalo, for in those days the white bones and skulls of buffaloes were one of the most common objects seen everywhere within the range of these magnificent wild cattle.

The total number of animals in these great herds ran into millions. Before senseless white men began to slaughter the animals just for the brutal pleasure of killing, and an absolutely uncontrolled fur trade encouraged both Indians and whites to kill the buf-

faloes for their hides only, the number of buffaloes on the plains was probably ten or even twenty times as large as the number of Indians that depended on the wild herds for both food and shelter.

When the various railroads reached the buffalo country, so-called bone-hunters gathered the skeletons and shipped them East to be made into fertilizers. From the records of the railroads it has been computed that enough bones have been shipped to account for about thirty millions of buffaloes.

To-day the skeleton or even a skull of a buffalo would be a rare sight, but when Tom and Jim scouted ahead of their pack-train and party, bleached bones and skulls of buffaloes were so common that the boys paid no attention to them; moreover their duty was to scan the country for signs of Indians and keep a sharp lookout ahead; of everything else they could take only a passing notice.

However, one skeleton on the spur of a low butte did attract their attention.

"Great smokes!" exclaimed Tom, "look at

these bones, Jim! That beast must have been a monster bull! These bones are big enough for two buffaloes."

"Maybe it was an elephant," Jim put in.

"Oh, elephant nothing!" retorted Tom, provoked at Jim's lack of interest. "Don't you know that elephants live only in India and Africa?"

By this time Tom was on the ground trying to free an enormous leg-bone of dirt.

"Get off your horse!" he requested Jim. "Why don't you get off and help me dig this out? If it was a silly prairie pup, you'd want to dig him out."

Jim got off and began helping Tom to pry and dig out the big leg-bone.

"Tom," he asked, "how did it ever get into the dirt on top of a hill? We're just fooling ourselves, Tom. That's no bone! It's a stone. All these things are stones. Tom, just lift them, they're heavy as rocks."

By this time the men were approaching and the boys asked them to come over and see the curiosity they had discovered.

The men agreed that the bones were not those of buffaloes.

"They are not real bones," Hartmann explained, "they are fossils. They are bones turned into rock."

If Tom and Jim could have traveled through the Bad Lands in our days in company with college men, scientists, and naturalists, the fossils of the Bad Lands would have told them most wonderful stories. So rich is here the record of the past, that in this respect also the region deserves to be called the Enchanted Lands.

The fossil bones which Tom and Jim found were probably those of the giant titanothere, an animal about as large as a small elephant. But numerous other fossils are found in various Bad Land formations. There are rhinoceroses and tapirs, little three-toed horses, strange six-horned grass-eaters, and fierce saber-toothed tigers. Strange birds, with true teeth, crocodiles, and giant turtles were also at home on the rivers and marshes of long ago.

The story which the rocks of the Bad Lands have preserved is more wonderful than the tales of the Arabian Nights, but it is a true story, not merely a fable or fairy tale.

Late in the afternoon the Benton party struck the Cheyenne River.

The Cheyenne runs on a wide shallow bed of soft mud and quicksand, and Brule used not a little of his bad and vigorous French when several of the horses became mired and had to be dragged out, before the men found a safe place to cross.

A little before dark, the party made camp in a grove of timber, where a swift creek of sweet and fairly clear water entered the Cheyenne from the northwest.

"It's Rapid Creek," Hartmann declared. "I'm sure of it, because all the other creeks from the Black Hills run dry in the foothills at this time of the year long before they reach the Cheyenne.

"And the trees are just what Tankaheeta told us, ash, cottonwoods, and elms. And here is his map.

"Brule, you needn't look at it. Better go and wash your horses."

"Not I," retorted Brule. "They can roll on the grass and rub themselves on the trees. Hurry up with your supper, Dutch. I'll have the horses staked out in ten minutes, and we're all hungry."

CHAPTER XIII

INTO THE MOUNTAINS BY MOONLIGHT

BRULE picketed every horse and Hartmann did his cooking on the smallest and quickest fire possible, using nothing but absolutely dry sticks that made no smoke, and as soon as the tea was made, the bacon fried, and some beans warmed up, the fire was put out. The fear of Indians was once more upon the party. The men all knew that the Indians not infrequently hunted in the foothill country and that for the next thirty miles they would have to use the utmost caution, if they would elude discovery.

No tent was set up. Men and boys rolled up in their blankets, each one in as convenient a spot as he could find, and slept under the open sky. The men, however, changed off in doing guard duty.

It was Benton's turn to watch from two

in the morning till day-break. When the sun as an immense red ball rose above the hills he called the men and, while they were getting breakfast and putting the packs in shape, he examined the country westward toward the foothills.

The boys met him when he returned. "What's the news, Father?" they asked. "Shall we start right away?"

"We're in for more trouble, I fear," answered Benton. "Look sharp to the southwest. Do you see that little streak of haze going up?"

Tom couldn't see it, but the keen eyes of Jim caught sight of a faint bluish streak rising against the horizon.

"It's smoke, Father," Jim stated. "If you look a little while you can see it move."

"Yes, it's smoke," assented Benton. "It's smoke from an Indian hunting camp, where they're drying some buffalo and elk meat.

"But I've learned more than that, I saw three squaws coming from the north and riding toward that smoke. Luckily they couldn't

see our camp, and Hartmann built a fire that made no smoke, but what I've seen is bad enough."

The two men in camp agreed with Benton that the smoke and the squaws were bad signs, and while they ate their simple breakfast, all agreed what the bad signs meant.

They were caught, so to speak, between two Indian camps. The main camp of the Sioux must have been located near the place where Rapid Creek comes out of the Black Hills, where the town of Rapid City, South Dakota, is located to-day, for that was a favorite camping place of the Teton Sioux. The hunting camp was located about twenty miles south of the main camp, near the foothills, where the smoke could be plainly seen, five or six miles from Benton's camp. The three squaws had been going from the main camp to dry the meat and cure the skins of some game the hunters had killed.

If the Benton party were to enter the hills through the gateway of Rapid Creek, they would have to travel close to the route which

the Indians would naturally follow between their two camps, and could not hope to avoid discovery. If they were discovered, they would most likely be robbed, because at that time the arm of the United States government and the fear of the soldiers had not yet reached the western Indians except, perhaps in the immediate vicinity of the large trading-posts on the Missouri River. Even on the Missouri River small parties of white men were sometimes fired at by ill-disposed Indians. A small party found far away from any trading-post, like the Benton party, was helplessly exposed to the whim of the lawless savages, whose cupidity was easily aroused at the sight of the supposed great wealth of all white traders. Even if the chiefs and the majority of a camp were well disposed, the chiefs and the good men had no means of controlling the lawless element, for the tribes had no real police or government. A chief ruled to the extent of his personal influence.

"We're in a beastly bad fix," said Brule. "We could lose three Tetons, but we never

could lose a whole campful of them. If they find us, we'll have to sell our goods to them, for if we don't, they'll rob us of both our goods and our horses and we'll be in luck if they let us carry our whole skins back to the Missouri.

"Me for traveling by moonlight till we strike the pine woods of the hills! It's our only chance of slipping past our red brothers."

"This time," Hartmann agreed, "you're awake, French. It's a moonlight trip or no travel. You can think of Marie, while you're jogging along."

"Say, Dutch," Brule returned the banter, "don't talk so loud. If there's any shooting, they'll pick you off first, because you're the biggest in the bunch; and I should hate to see an honest fellow come to such a sad end."

Everybody laughed and for a moment the dead seriousness of their condition was forgotten. Both Tom and Jim would have liked to join in the banter, but their father had strictly forbidden them ever to mix in the

teasing or little differences between the two men.

"Everybody hates a fresh kid," he had told them. "He would hate himself if he could only see himself. If either of you fellows ever gets fresh I'll have a man take him to the nearest boat-landing and he'll go home to his mother."

The boys were rather doubtful about being sent home, but they felt that something disagreeable would happen, if they forgot themselves.

The day wore away slowly. Two men kept watch all the time, while the other three slept as much as they could, that is, as much as flies and ants crawling over their faces would let them.

As soon as it was fairly dark they started. A novice in Western travel might have been at a loss how to follow the valley of a small stream without tracing every bend of its bed. Benton and his men had no difficulty of this kind. The low hills on either side of the valley, which varied in width from a quarter to

half a mile, were plainly visible in the moonlight. As the valley contained but little timber, the travelers directed their course from one small grove or conspicuous tree to another and made excellent progress.

They traveled, of course, as silently as possible and each man looked sharp about him so as to avoid falling in with any camp of Indians.

After they had traveled steadily for about six hours the first signs of dawn appeared on the eastern sky, and the party began to look for a good place to camp. A grove of trees appeared half a mile to the northwest, the direction in which they were traveling.

"Ride ahead carefully," Benton told Hartmann and Tom, "and make sure that there are no Sioux in that grove."

When the two had approached to within three hundred yards of the trees, Hartmann stopped the horses, and said it would be best for one of them to hold the horses in a hollow and let the other walk and crawl up on the grove.

"It would be too risky to go right ahead on horseback," he remarked.

"Let me go," Tom begged. "I'm not afraid. I'll be back in ten minutes."

Tom's heart beat fast as he carefully approached the grove, making good use of every bush and rise and depression in the ground.

The grove was silent, but here and there a cottonwood stump looked like an Indian wrapped in his blanket and standing on guard. Tom's heart beat faster and the blood rushed to his head when he saw these gray silent specters, although his good sense told him that if any Indians were in the grove they would either be asleep in a tepee or would be rolled up in their blankets behind a tree or bush.

He had almost gone through the whole grove, silently slipping from tree to tree, when something stirred in front of him on the edge of the grove.

Tom's heart jumped into his throat and his first impulse was to call for Hartmann. However, he controlled himself and stood as if

frozen to his place. A second and a third creature arose. Tom felt a big Sioux take hold of his scalp. Some more big creatures arose as if they came out of the ground, and now Tom came to and realized that he had disturbed a bunch of elk before they had been quite ready to go to their morning pasture.

The elk trotted off and Tom, elated with joy and being certain that no unwelcome Tetons had pre-empted this good camp, rushed back to Hartmann. In his hurry he stumbled over a rock, fell flat to the ground and with his left hand landed squarely on a bunch of cactus, or prickly pear. The stinging pain caused by the needle-like spines of the cactus proved too much for Tom's excited nerves, and involuntarily he let out a ringing yell of pain.

The next minute Hartmann was at his side, and Benton, who had slowly followed his scouts came racing up at a gallop with his gun ready for action.

Both men were much relieved when Tom explained:

"I fell on a cactus bunch and just hollered before I knew it."

"We surely thought an Indian was scalping you," Jim told his brother, "from the yell you let out."

"Well, getting scalped can't hurt much worse," Tom retorted. "If you don't believe it just fall on a bunch of these awful needles," but Jim was willing to take Tom's word for it; and he patiently helped his brother to pull the spines out of the sore hand.

The grove furnished good shade and concealment for the party, and the day passed much as the preceding one.

A small party of Indians going north was again seen about two miles to the west. From this observation Benton and his men now felt sure that the Tetons had a camp of some size on the west side of the creek, where the stream comes out of the hills.

"That is a place where the Indians like to camp," Tankaheeta had told them.

As the men sat and talked over their plans

for the next few days they came to the conclusion that they could not be more than fifteen or twenty miles from the hills.

"If we can pass that Teton camp," Benton summed up their plans, "we'll be in the Black Hills at sunrise."

During the second night the men urged the horses to their best speed.

When they approached the plain, where the creek turns sharply southwestward as one travels up stream, they were no longer in doubt about the big Indian camp.

The men could smell the smoldering camp fires, and the horses showed plainly that they smelled Indians, and Tom and Jim said they could hear dogs barking.

The travelers now left the creek and made a detour northward across the prairie and around some pine-clad hills just northwest of the present town of Rapid City.

The first robin began to sing as the horsemen rounded the hill and entered the beautiful Red Valley, where now a fine Indian School is located, educating the grandchildren

and great-grandchildren of the very Indians who in the days of our story camped on the site of Rapid City.

When the men realized that they were now really entering the mystic hills, Brule began to talk French.

"Quit the jabbering," Hartmann badgered him, "talk a real language," and then he himself began to compare the beauties of the hills and the Red Valley before them to the Black Forest country of his boyhood home.

"Can't we give a yell?" asked Brule.

"No yells here!" ordered Benton. "Thank God, we have reached Pahasapah! Pahasapah, the mystic Black Hills of the Teton Sioux!

"But we are not safe yet. The Sioux camp is little more than a mile down-stream. We must keep going."

After men and beasts had refreshed themselves with a drink from the creek, which was here a rapid stream of cool crystal water, the party turned southwestward up the Red Valley.

Within less than two hours, the beautiful Red Valley of trees, meadows, flowers and birds lay behind them and they were laboriously plodding up a wooded canyon, out of which the cold rushing stream met them, flowing over a bed of rubble and gravel.

It was almost noon, when Benton said: "Here we stop for the night."

Just ahead of them was enough grass and brush for the horses to feed, but below their camp the canyon was so narrow that Brule stretched his ropes from wall to wall so that the horses could not take the back trail.

After dinner the two lads were so tired that they fell asleep in the shade of a willow-bush.

"Let them sleep," Benton said with a smile to the men. "If they are not sleepy in the evening, they can watch the horses till midnight. I figure all three of us will be glad to roll in after supper."

CHAPTER XIV

A RESTLESS NIGHT

BENTON fixed a screen over the faces of his boys, so that they might sleep undisturbed by flies, which were quite annoying during the warm hours of the afternoon.

The boys had to be called for supper.

"It's pretty rough on the kids to miss a whole night's sleep," remarked Hartmann, "and then in addition travel hard until noon and keep a sharp lookout for our red friends."

"The boys did their duty," both Benton and Brule agreed.

"Had we better call them?" Brule asked. "They are still sound asleep."

"Sure; call them," their father replied. "They'll be sore at all of us if we let them miss a meal."

After supper Benton told the lads that they might watch the horses and keep an eye on the back trail.

"Unless we are just in luck," he added, "or a heavy shower passes over our trail the Indians will almost surely find our trail, and if they find it leading into the hills, some of them are very likely to follow us."

As the men were very tired and sleepy, they soon rolled up in their blankets and fell asleep to the music of the creek.

The boys first traveled up the canyon for a little ways to look at the horses. The canyon was nowhere over a hundred yards wide, and steep pine-clad hills, or bare rocks rose on either side of it to the height of several hundred or even a thousand feet.

All the horses seemed to be there, although it was difficult to count them, because the bottom of the canyon was thickly overgrown with bushes of willows, poplar, june-berry, wild cherry, and other bushes and trees; which, however, left room for quite a number of patches of good green grass.

"Well, I don't think any of them will straggle away up the canyon," Tom remarked. "And if they do, we'll find them to-morrow on our way up. We might as well go back and find a good place to lie down for watching the back trail."

Such a place the lads soon discovered. On a shelf near the narrows, where Brule had stretched his ropes across, the boys lay down on a bed of needles shed by a grove of sapling yellow pine, the common pine of the Black Hills.

After the sun had disappeared behind a ridge of pines, the daylight faded very rapidly.

A noisy kingfisher on a dead stump made his last plunge and disappeared to his roosting-place. Thrushes and whitethroats and other daylight birds sought their resting-places and became silent, but the voices and sounds of the night became audible.

Back and forth over the canyon and high above the hills sailed the night hawks, uttering their sharp "paint, paint." And as dark-

ness fell over the canyon and the mountains the strange treble of the little screech owl and the terrifying hoot of the great horned owl rang through the night. But the most impressive sound was the splashing, murmuring, and gurgling of the creek as its waters rushed from one wall to the other over shingle and pebbles.

Clouds were covering the mountains, and as the moon did not rise till near midnight, it grew very dark.

"Tom," whispered Jim, "if Father and the men weren't here, I know I'd be scared stiff."

"So would I," Tom admitted.

"I'm scared now," Jim confessed. "If Father and the men weren't here, I'd light out. I'd make for the Indian camp just to get away from this dark night."

"You needn't be in a hurry about running away to the Indians; they'll come to us soon enough," Tom told him. "Father says himself that the Indians will most likely find our trail and follow it into the hills."

"I don't see," said Jim after a long silence, "why we might not as well go back to camp and roll in. Indians can't travel in this dark canyon any more than we can."

"Doesn't make any difference," Tom replied, "whether they can travel or not. Father told us to watch till midnight and call him if we heard or saw anything suspicious. So we just watch till midnight."

It seemed to the boys that they had never known such long hours.

Toward midnight the stars came out and the night grew so chilly that the lads shivered with cold and suppressed excitement. Rocks and trees began to stand out in fanciful shapes in the light of the moon and stars, and dark shadows added to the confusion of the anxious watchers, for a moonlight night in the forest is far more spooky than a cloudy night.

Even the night-birds seemed to have gone to sleep, but the creek rushing noisily down the canyon seemed to be alive.

The lads talked only in whispers, while

they strained every nerve for any suspicious sight or sounds.

"If we could only build a fire," Jim wished, "we'd get over shivering and it wouldn't be so spooky, but, of course, we can't."

"We surely can't," Tom whispered. "You remember what we saw in the canyon on Sheep Mountain. We'd be fine watchmen lying down at a fire!"

Again and again one lad or the other thought he saw something move stealthily from one dark patch of shadow to the other. A small piece of rock became loosened and rolled down the slope, and the lads held their breath to listen for the footsteps of an Indian scout.

At last there did come a real noise. There could be no mistake about it, the whole drove of horses was rushing down the canyon in a stampede.

The boys grabbed their guns and ran into the canyon to prevent the horses from breaking through the ropes and running away on the back trail.

"Look out, don't do any foolish shooting," Tom called to Jim, "but we must stop them from running away."

By shouting to them and using their guns as clubs the lads stopped the panic-stricken animals.

"What in the world can be the matter with them?" Jim asked. "I didn't think any Indians could have passed us and slipped into the canyon above our camp."

"I don't think they were scared by Indians," Tom told him. "It was probably a bear or a panther. When it comes to stampeding, a horse is about as big a fool as walks on four legs. Get him scared and he'll run till he breaks his neck. He just doesn't know any better."

It was not long before the three men came down the canyon, because the stampeding horses, rushing past the camp had made enough noise to awake even the most sound and tired sleepers.

"Good work, boys!" Benton praised the lads, "that you didn't let the frightened

beasts break away. We would be in a fine mess if you hadn't stopped them."

By being petted and spoken to the horses soon calmed down, but they would not go back above the camp, and from the way they snorted and acted alarmed, the men concluded that some beast of prey must have attacked them; moreover, old Jack, one of the older and slower horses was missing.

"You boys had better go to bed now," Benton suggested. "We men will watch till morning."

"We can't sleep in camp, Father," Jim urged. "May we get our blankets and sleep here? In camp we'd be afraid of grizzly bears and panthers."

"You fellows made big talk at Fort Pierre," Brule began to tease them. "You weren't afraid of bears or Indians. You itched to see a mountain lion. Here, take this lantern and scout up the canyon. I bet a mountain lion is making a meal of old Jack now."

"Oh, close up, French, close up," Hart-

mann broke in. "You are worse scared than the boys. Why don't you go after him?"

"I don't want him," Brule replied. "I never said I did. I'll leave him to you."

"Neither do I want him," Benton joined in with a laugh. "We'll look for him in the morning. Get your blankets, boys, and sleep here, if you care."

It didn't take the boys long to return with their blankets. For a while they listened to the talk of the men and the snorting and stamping of the horses, but after their excitement had worn off, they fell into a sound sleep, feeling that as long as their father and the other two men were watching they were entirely safe.

When their father called them it was daylight.

"Come, boys," he said, as he gently touched the sleeping lads. "Breakfast is ready. Hartmann has baked a stack of pancakes. He won't like it if you let them get cold."

Thus ended the first night in the canyon of the Mystic Mountains.

CHAPTER XV

SCARING THE INDIANS

THE excitement of the night had one good result, it helped the party to make an early start.

Old Jack, however, was not to be found, but as the supplies had been very considerably reduced it was easy enough to distribute Jack's load to the other horses.

"Boys," remarked Benton, as he took a look at the much shrunken supplies, "it is high time that we reach a country where it is safe for us to hunt. If we draw on our rations for another month the way we have done during the three weeks since we left the Missouri, we won't have enough flour and bacon left to invite a hungry mouse to dinner."

Half a mile above camp they found old Jack

dead, and part of the carcass devoured by some wild beast.

All, of course, went to look at the signs around their lost horse.

"Grizzly," Hartmann pronounced. "Look at Jack's right hind-foot. It was caught in a crack of rocks so he could not get away."

"Poor old Jack," commented Brule, "he wasn't a racer, but his nose and ears were keen. The bear never would have caught him, if he had not been trapped in the rocks."

"Let's watch for the grizzly," the boys suggested. "Maybe we can get him."

"Not very likely," their father told them. "He's asleep in the mountains now. He'll come back for some more horse-flesh to-night."

They moved on. The going was the worst they had yet encountered. In many places they had to travel in the bed of the creek, which was filled with loose rocks of all sizes. The horses slipped and stumbled so that the men all feared that broken legs would cause them the loss of some more horses before

they got fairly into the mountains. In a dozen places, the men with axes and picks had to make a passage by clearing away rocks and driftwood and fallen trees.

It was almost noon when they passed out of the canyon into a fairly open, but narrow valley.

They stopped for a short rest and light lunch, and in the evening, they made camp at the foot of another canyon, about two miles above the first one.

One who has not traveled in a wild country might well wonder how these men could feel at all confident about the route they should travel, but men with experience seldom lose a trail or route described by a competent woodsman or plainsman.

"Minnelusa, the little rapid river," Tankaheeta had told them, "is the only creek that carries water to the Cheyenne in the summer. All the other little streams die in their beds after they leave the Black Mountains.

"Before you ride into the mountains, you cross the Red Valley, which the Indians call

the Race Track, and which runs all around the mountains. In this valley, the grass is fine and you will find many clear springs at the foot of the red cliffs.

"After you cross the Red Valley, you must ride up a bad canyon, where Wakpala Minnelusa, the little river of rapid water, runs like a wild colt over many rocks and logs.

"Then you will ride over a long stretch, almost a day's journey, of bushes and little meadows, and then you must ride up another bad canyon."

The directions of Tankaheeta had been so plain that they would not even have needed the simple deerskin map.

They were now encamped for the night, at the foot of the second canyon and all were happy to have come so far without any other mishap, but the loss of old Jack.

Brule thought that they had eluded the Indians for good.

"I don't feel so sure about it," Benton argued. "It is too good to expect that no Indian would find our broad trail made by

a dozen horses. And if they find it, some of them will follow it. It's too good an excuse for a few days' loafing and the prospects of a little excitement with a camp-fire yarn thrown in. We'll have to watch our back trail like a wise buck or moose."

"That's good-enough talk," Hartmann commented. "But tell me what to do with them if they should stalk us. We can't vanish out of this gorge as we did in the Bad Lands; we can't fly over the mountains. If they find our trail, they can follow it, and if they follow it, they'll find us. That's the way I figure it."

"I know what I'd like to do with them," Brule fell in, "I'd bury the whole bunch under a pile of rocks."

"Good, big talk," Hartmann laughed, "but if you did, we'd all have to slip out of the country a whole lot quicker than we slipped in.

"That plan is no good, Brule. Think of something better and less murderous."

The night passed quietly, and the next day

after clambering and stumbling up the second canyon they made camp on the site of the present quaint little mountain town of Mystic.

At this place, they felt they would have to stop a day or two, for, from this point to his camp, Tankaheeta's directions were less clear.

"In the little valley above the second canyon," he had told them, "Minnelusa, the little rapid river, makes two forks. One heads northward, and the other southward. You must go south. But you cannot always follow the little stream, for it runs through much brush, and the beavers have built dams across the stream and have many ponds and waterfalls. So you must travel up and down the hills of rocks and find or make your own trail."

It fell to Hartmann and Jim to guard the back trail in the camp at Mystic, and they selected a convenient spot at the lower end of the valley and just a little ways down from the head of the last canyon. The two guards

were concealed by rocks and clumps of bushes, but they had a clear view of a hundred yards of canyon below them, where neither man nor animal could move without being seen.

While the guard thus quietly watched the back trail, Brule and Tom scouted for the most feasible trail south and Benton himself stayed in camp ready to receive such information as might be secured.

The forenoon passed slowly, and Jim realized for the first time in his life what a nerve-strain it is to be waiting and watching, hour after hour, for something that may never occur.

"We might as well go back to camp," suggested Jim, when they had finished their bite of noon lunch. "There isn't anybody following us."

"Not on your life," Hartmann replied with emphasis. "We stay here till dark, that's your father's order. We'd be mighty poor pickets if we didn't, and we might expose our whole trip to failure."

Again the hours dragged and dragged with painful slowness for the boy, but the man did not seem to be in the least impatient.

"Where did you learn it?" the boy asked, with admiration, when Hartmann had just relieved him from a turn of watching.

"Learned it in the United States army," the man replied. "A soldier has to do that sort of thing by day or night, whenever his turn comes, and he learns to think nothing of it. Of course, he isn't on guard duty all day, or all night; he is relieved after two hours, but we haven't men enough for a two-hour relief."

About three o'clock it was again Jim's turn to watch. There seemed to be something moving slowly behind the bushes in the canyon. Jim looked again. He rose to his knees.

"Look, Hartmann," he whispered; "there they are!"

Without hesitation, as if he had known all day what would happen, and what he would have to do, the ex-soldier planted a bullet so

close at the feet of the two Indians that the dirt flew up into their faces.

And so quick that Jim could hardly tell what was happening, the two naked Indians fell to the ground and, creeping or running on all fours, disappeared from sight in a thicket down the canyon.

"Why did you shoot at them?" asked the boy, with a loudly beating heart.

"I didn't shoot at them," the man replied, "I just drove them back. We couldn't let them walk into our camp. Run back and tell your father, that we must try the scare on them we planned out last night."

When Jim reached camp, Brule and Tom had already returned.

"Hartmann drove two Indians back into the bushes," he called to his father. "He says we must try the scare on them we planned last night."

Benton and Brule at once fell to work and when the sun set everything was ready and all went to the place where Hartmann and Jim was watching.

Benton carried an immense Jack-o'-lantern made out of mud-daubed canvas and willow hoops, while Brule was provided with a bark horn for calling moose, as he had learned in the forests of Minnesota and Ontario.

When it grew dark Benton lit the candles in his lantern and as by means of a short handle he waved the monstrous canvas pumpkin back and forth and up and down, a real monster with fiery eyes and a formidable row of teeth seemed to be glaring down the canyon.

Brule had concealed himself in a thicket on the other side of the valley from which he sent out the most hair-raising bellows and grunts of a mad bull moose.

"It's a perfectly good plan," he had told his friends. "The Indians here know elk and deer and buffalo, but have never seen nor heard a moose."

For an hour after darkness Benton's Jack-o'-lantern ghost glared down into the canyon, while Brule's evil spirit made the mountains

Benton's Jack-o'-lantern ghost glared down into the canyon.
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echo and re-echo with blood-curdling bellows and grunts.

Then all returned quietly to camp. Brule stood guard through the night, while the other four travelers turned in to sleep as well as they might.

Before daybreak Benton took up his post at Hartmann's rock, while the boys and the other two men packed and saddled the horses.

When the sun rose like a red ball over the pines, the whole party started on a trail southward which Brule and Tom had picked out.

Nothing had been seen or heard of the two Indians.

"We scared them out this time," Brule declared.

"I think we did," Hartmann assented. "Make an Indian believe there's a bad spirit around, and he'll dig out for good. Brule surely made a noise like an evil spirit, and Benton's pumpkin was a gruesome sight."

Thus the Benton party at last penetrated into the heart of the mystic Black Hills.

The three men, however, were fully aware that only one of their big problems had been solved. They had indeed penetrated into the hills, at whose black profile they had so often gazed from the plains and from the buttes of the Bad Lands. But they were now practically lost in an uninhabited wilderness. Tankaheeta had frankly acknowledged that from this point on he could not describe any route or trail to them; they had to find their own way southward through a maze of valleys and across a confusion of sharp-rocked ridges and divides.

In this region Tankaheeta's friend had been lost, and if Benton's party did not find a passable route for the horses, and game for the men to live on, they would soon have to kill some horses for food and either abandon the others or turn back toward the Missouri with all their plans hopelessly ruined.

CHAPTER XVI

LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS

IF one takes the train to-day from Rapid City into the hills, he can easily remember his route as far as Mystic, but the route from Mystic southward to the story-famed little town of Custer becomes at once bewildering.

The secluded mountain hamlet has been well named, for there is an air of mystery about it. A dozen low cabins of rough sawed pine boards fit well into the little valley, bounded by hills of black and gray rocks, and one is very agreeably surprised not to find a clump of screaming white shanties, which seem to be the conventional means of destroying the harmony and beauty of the wilderness.

A sod house for the plains and the Bad Lands; the tepee, the log cabin or rough

board cabin for the forest; those are architectures that fit into God's own landscape.

Now the road seems to be following up a small mountain stream; the next moment it cuts across a ridge and the traveler is in doubt as to whether he is going up stream or down stream. Then the engine puffs itself into a tunnel, again he catches a glimpse of a tumbling, winding stream, another tunnel, and still another, and another, until the traveler gives up the attempt of making a mental picture of the route.

Through this kind of mountain country the Benton party pushed forward till the heat became oppressive.

The valleys of the streams were impassable, because most of them were dammed by beavers, the steep slopes exposing bare black rocks were equally so, and on the ridges the rock was often split and jagged like broken timbers stood on end.

The open stand of yellow pine furnished almost no shade, while their tawny columns

gave the atmosphere of a spirit world to the whole landscape.

"Here we camp!" Benton called, when the party reached one of those little open meadows so characteristic of the Black Hills to this day. "That's enough for to-day," he continued. "One horse dead, and another half dead. If we don't find a better route we will soon be a horseless troop."

One of the pack-horses had lost its footing on the rocks and slippery pine needles, had rolled down the hillside and, with a broken neck, had splashed into a beaver pond.

Soon the packs were piled up and covered with canvas, the men were enjoying their noon lunch and the jaded horses were quietly feeding on the meadow.

After lunch, it was agreed that two parties should scout for a passable route southward.

Benton and Hartmann struck out in an easterly direction, the two boys had been given permission to go west, while it fell to

Brule to guard the camp and look after the horses.

"Don't get lost, boys," Benton warned the lads, as they climbed up a steep mountain spur.

"Those boys," Hartmann commented, "stand the trip better than men or horses. They are light on foot, they don't worry, and the whole trip is a great lark for them."

When the lads reached the top of the ridge, Tom gave Jim a boost as the latter climbed the highest tree.

"Half a mile west there's a valley which seems to run in the right direction," Jim reported, when he had slid down the brown trunk.

The lads crossed two narrow ridges and ravines to reach the valley Jim had selected, but the whole landscape looked so different when they actually traveled over it, that the boys were not quite sure that they had found the valley they had started for. However, the going in the valley they did follow proved reasonably good. The ground was fairly

open and the little stream was not obstructed by beavers.

A feeling of emptiness in their stomachs, at last, reminded them that it was time to return to camp.

They were somewhat perplexed when on turning around the whole landscape seemed to take on an appearance of strangeness. In their eagerness to explore for a route they had not marked the spot where they entered the valley. After they had gone about an hour on the homeward trail, they climbed the ridge to their right, fully expecting to see the camp below them to the east of the ridge. But, look as they might, there was only the silent mountain forest with no sign of camp, man, or horse.

"We've come too far," said Jim; "we've passed the camp!"

Tom was quite sure they had not gone far enough.

"Our camp is a mile down the ridge," he maintained.

"Then let's hurry," Jim replied. "I'm

getting awfully hungry. It will soon be dark and it's going to rain."

The lads did hurry, which is the very worst thing a man can do when he is in doubt about his trail or direction.

In the meantime, the sun had sunk behind the hills toward the west, the eastern slopes all lay in a heavy shadow and hills and valleys looked so utterly strange that the lads felt they had never been in these parts of the mountains before. The ridge suddenly ended.

"Let's cross the valley and climb up the other side," Jim suggested.

They rushed down the slope into a thicket of spruce and willows, and did not come to themselves until they floundered up to their knees in a beaver pond.

"Come back, we'll get drowned here," Tom called.

They found an open spot and sat down.

"We're a couple of fools," Tom continued; "we're lost, that's all there's to it.

The men will have a good laugh at us."

"How far do you think we are from camp?"

"Ten miles," Jim blurted out. "I don't know, I don't know, where we are."

"Neither do I," Tom confessed. "Let's get under shelter before it begins to rain; no use to slash around any more."

They sat down under some tall leaning pines, trying to collect their wits, but in their anxiety to reach camp before dark and before the breaking of the storm, they had become panic-stricken and had lost all sense of direction and location.

"We can't be more than a mile from camp," Tom said, after both lads had caught their breath, "but I have not the least idea in what direction it is. If I hadn't seen the clouds coming from the west, I shouldn't even know the points of the compass."

Jim did not reply. He was watching the clouds. Rapidly moving streamers and swirls and great whirling masses were rush-

ing ahead of a solid wall of deep bluish-black, which was incessantly pierced and cut by glaring trails of lightning.

At times the thunder rolled majestically overhead, like the voice of the Almighty, then the very mountains shook and trembled and echoed with sharp distant crashes.

Crouched close together, the lads thought in silence of the words their mother used to read at old Fort Pierre: "The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness." The Psalmist of ancient Palestine must have lived through some such thunder-storm, while he was hiding in the desert, a fugitive from the wrath of King Saul.

The storm was upon them now. The pines swayed and groaned; blinding flashes, followed instantly by crashing, reverberating thunder shot from the black sky upon the opposite ridge.

"We can't stay under these big trees," exclaimed Tom, as if awaking from the silence

of awe and fear, "we must get under some bushes."

The boys ran down the slope and hid under some low spruces, but soon a cold, wind-driven rain came down in such torrents that the lost boys were as wet as if they had been swimming with their clothes on.

The mountains and the forest were lost in an inky darkness made only more black by the streaks and sheets of lightning. A blinding flash set on fire the big dead pine under which the boys had been hiding. The violence of the rain abated and the old resinous tree burned with a red, uncanny glow like a giant beacon-light on the dark, forbidding mountain.

When the storm had passed eastward, the lads gathered courage to secure some live coals from the burning tree for starting a camp-fire. Then they took off their dripping clothes and wrung the water out of them and warmed their shivering bodies at the red glow. Had any one seen them, they might

well have been taken for spirits of the mountains.

Thus they spent the night and were thankful to live through it, and for a time they almost forgot that they were lost in the wild mountains.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LOST ONES FOUND

WHEN morning came at last, the boys remembered what the men had told them to do in case they were lost: "Stay where you are and build a big fire; you cannot be far from camp, unless you hike away for a day or two."

In order to help the men to find them, the lads built a big smudge on the top of the ridge. It was not very long before they heard a shot. Both boys yelled as loud as they could, although the wind was wrong and they knew the men could not hear them. Within ten minutes they heard another shot much nearer and now they started to meet the men.

"You fool boys," Brule cried, as he saw them coming down the slope, "so you did go off and get lost. I thought you would. You

aren't on Sheep Mountain now, where you can't get off."

Benton thought they deserved a good licking for their carelessness, but concluded that they had been punished enough by the scare they had suffered and by going all night without supper.

It proved that they had spent the night only about a mile from camp and within a few rods of the place where they had crossed the ridge on their way from camp the day before. It was on account of their panic and the approach of the storm that they had failed to recognize the locality.

"The next time you boys wander off, you take one of our small compasses, steel and tinder, and a gun with you," Benton told them, after they had put out the fire.

"And now, I suppose, we had better make a bee-line for camp. Hartmann is fixing up a fine stew of rabbit and grouse. He threatened to eat it all himself if we weren't back in two hours."

Hartmann's breakfast was appreciated by

the whole party, for it was the first time for a month that they had eaten fresh meat. Since they had left Ponca Creek they had not fired a gun for fear of betraying their presence to Indians.

The men had discovered a passable route southward on which the party started as soon as breakfast was over.

Of Indians they had seen no trace, and all agreed that for the present, at least, they were rid of them.

Their problem now was to find Tankaheeta's camping-ground. It certainly was not an easy thing to find a set of tepee-poles left somewhere in the Black Hills, a mountain system covering an area almost twice as large as that of the whole State of Massachusetts.

Toward noon, as they were traveling along the crest of a ridge, they discovered an open prairie of some size lying east of them.

Could this be the prairie Tankaheeta had spoken of? If it was, they were on the right trail. At all events, the place looked so in-

viting after a week of toilsome mountain travel that they at once decided to head for the prairie.

"Our horses need rest and some real grass," Benton gave as his opinion, "and, boys, we have to lay in a supply of meat and seal up our provisions, or it will surely be horse-steak for us long before the first snow flies."

The prairie about a mile long and perhaps half a mile wide seemed to be an ideal spot for a party like Benton's.

The grass was at its best. It was short like the buffalo grass of the western plains. The prairie was less grassy than the rolling mesa of Sheep Mountain, because more flowers and weeds were mixed into the carpet of bluish-green.

Bluebells and pink fox-gloves had hung out their pendant flowers to the wind and to wild bees, and many sage-like plants gave indications that the rainfall was not always as abundant as it had been this year.

An open grove of young yellow pine, with

a clear little mountain stream running through it, invited them to camp.

"It's a fine spot," Benton commented, "if you don't have to look out for redskins."

"Benton, I think we can forget them for a while," the cautious ex-soldier gave as his opinion. "No Indian will stand up against a ghost, and I think you and Brule have certainly strengthened their faith in the bad spirits of the Black Hills.

"I say we camp here and forget the Indians for a while."

So camp was set up and the horses were hobbled and turned loose.

"I'll take no chances on any of them striking out on the back trail or getting lost in the mountains," Brule remarked. "It's bad enough to have to hunt for your horses on the prairie. Lose them in the mountains and they've gone."

Benton having brought in a young blacktail deer, Hartmann invited everybody to a Thanksgiving dinner, in the evening.

"I say it's a Thanksgiving dinner," the sol-

dier cook maintained obstinately, when his friends chaffed him about getting his calendar mixed up.

"Haven't we a lot of things to be thankful for? Didn't we get away from the old Fort with a thousand eyes watching us? Didn't we lose the reds in the Bad Lands, and didn't we teach them a fine lesson on ghosts? And now, I really think we are on Tankaheeta's trail again and I believe we'll find plenty of game.

"So I say, it's Thanksgiving to-night, boys. Fall to, eat and be thankful!"

"We haven't found the tepee of our Teton friend yet," Brule replied.

"No, we haven't, French. But men who can lose a bunch of Teton scouts can find a tepee, and I'll stay in these mountains till we find it.

"Benton, if I had thought your trip was easy, I never would have joined you."

The men sat long around the camp-fire and lived over again the adventures of the trip. The two boys either listened in silence or

talked of their mother and little Peter at St. Louis.

The stars sparkled over the prairie and a full moon made the black mountains stand out in bold relief against the deep blue sky of the summer night.

In the distance some wolves and coyotes were giving vent to their emotions in their own peculiar way.

"It's a good song," Brule expressed himself. "Their song means meat for us; you don't hear them sing where there's no game."

"What's the plan for to-morrow?" asked Hartmann.

"Hunting for the men," Benton told him, "and scouting for the boys."

"Good plan," Brule joined in. "And if you boys get lost again, you'll get a licking and I'll tie you to a tree. We can't have a couple of babies running around loose in the mountains."

"We'll not get lost again," both lads protested, "and if Tankaheeta came through this part of the mountains, we'll find his trail."

CHAPTER XVIII

EXPLORING THE MOUNTAINS

THE next morning the whole party left at the same time, as it was, at last, thought safe to leave the camp unguarded.

As a matter of extra precaution, the three men rode carefully along their back trail for about two miles without, however, discovering anything suspicious.

Since they entered the hills they had seen very little game and they had begun to fear that they might suffer from scarcity of provisions, which was not at all unusual for parties who had to depend entirely on game. The Lewis and Clark expedition several times almost faced starvation, although at that time the country had not been depleted of its abundant game supply. For various reasons, such as abundant rainfall or drought, a

region may be rich in game one season, while it may be practically deserted another season.

The fears Benton and his men had entertained in this respect were, however, soon dispelled.

After they had been riding up a rather open valley where browse and good grass were abundant, they secured two blacktail and one whitetail deer.

The whitetail, or Virginia deer, is the common Eastern deer, the blacktail, or mule deer, so called on account of its large ears, is the common Western deer, found in the Bad Lands and in the Rocky Mountain country. In the Black Hills as in other regions of the Central West both kinds are found to this day.

As the men had now all the game they could well take back to camp, they ceased hunting and gave themselves over to exploring the unknown mountains, whose heart, they had at last reached.

Brule thought there ought to be trout in

the clear little mountain stream which wound its way through groves of poplar and spruce. He tried every good-looking pool with grasshoppers and dragon flies, but no trout rose to his hook and bait. A kind of dace or chub and a few small suckers were the only fish he could see or catch. He soon gave up fishing in disgust, but told his friends that in many streams in Michigan and Ontario, the trout were so abundant and so hungry that one could catch a good mess at any time by simply using a piece of red flannel for bait.

At the present time, there are a number of good trout streams in the Black Hills, but originally there were no trout in the Black Hills, because in order to reach the clear mountain streams, the trout would have had to travel many hundred miles down such muddy streams as the lower Yellowstone and the Missouri, and then up the Belle Fourche and the Cheyenne. Only dace and suckers reached the streams of the Black Hills; the trout have been planted by man.

The three men worked their way up hill as

well as they could. They figured from Tankaheeta's sketch map that the Peak-you-see-far-away, now known as Harney Peak must lie somewhere about east of their camp; so they continued to travel in that direction.

They soon found that they were now indeed in the heart of the Black Hills, which they had so often longed to see and explore. To right and to left of them, rose bare fantastic ridges and spires of granite. Some of these spires were two hundred feet high, and a golden eagle had selected a ledge near the top of one of them for his eyrie. The old birds soared in grand spirals a thousand feet overhead and three half-grown young could be plainly seen on the ledge.

Hartmann and Brule tried for half an hour to reach the nest, but the place was absolutely inaccessible.

While the men were thus hunting and exploring, the two boys were not idle.

In order to decide whether this was the prairie on which Tankaheeta had camped, they planned to ride all around it.

The first thing that attracted their attention was a beaver pond and dam below a high and steep ridge.

"Let's see how they build and repair a dam," said Jim, as he made a break in it, which caused the water to run out, with a noisy, rushing torrent.

The boys sat down and waited. Within less than half an hour, a large beaver came swimming up to the break. However, he did not land, but dived with a loud splash and slap and did not return.

"He'll come back," said Jim. "Their feeding-ground is near the dam. Just see how they have eaten all the grass and weeds near it."

"Nothing of the kind," protested Tom. "Beavers don't eat grass and weeds. They eat bark and brush and things that grow in the water."

Before long a woodchuck came out of the thicket and began to feed.

"There," whispered Tom; "that's the creature that has eaten the weeds and the grass."

Jim gave a low whistle and the woodchuck sat up and listened, but as he did not see the boys above him and did not get their scent, he began feeding again.

After a while, he walked along the dam, but when he came to the break, he seemed much perplexed.

"He's going to jump it," whispered Jim.

"No, he won't," Tom replied, "he's afraid he can't make it."

"Look, he's going to cross the water on a pole."

The woodchuck walked very carefully, as a man would do on a slippery log, but when he came to the middle of the pole, he lost his hold and fell into the water, but quickly swam and scrambled ashore on the other side.

Both boys laughed as the little animal shook himself and then ambled along the dam and disappeared behind some trees.

"That beaver dam is his road," remarked Tom, "but Jim, we must be off now and see if we can't find Tankaheeta's trail or camping place."

"I'll tell you something," Jim began to argue. "I don't believe we'll find that camp on this prairie. We've struck the wrong prairie. Don't you remember that Tanka-heeta said his prairie ran the way the sun shines in the morning and evening? That means it ran east and west. And he said a stream ran through it. Don't you see that this prairie runs north and south? And the stream doesn't run through it. It just creeps along the edge of it for a short distance, and then it wanders off in a little valley, as does nearly every other stream in these mountains."

The lads now scouted with great care all around the edge of the prairie, until they struck the small creek only a few rods below their own camp.

"I guess you are right," Tom admitted, a little crestfallen. "There's surely no sign of horses or tepee on this prairie."

"Let's follow the creek for a little way. I don't see what more we can do."

They had ridden about a mile, when Tom, who was leading gave a yell.

"Hurry up, Jim," he cried. "Here's some old horse sign, as sure as you live."

Both lads dismounted and dropped the reins on the ground, a method by which Western horses generally are taught to stand without hitching.

There was no mistake about Tom's discovery and on a patch of bare clay a little farther down some horse-tracks, although they were very old, were still plainly visible.

"Hurrah," cried Jim, "we've found it, we've found it! Tankaheeta's trail, going south. But he never saw the prairie on which we are camping, that's why he didn't mention it."

The lads might have turned home now, but as it was still early in the afternoon, Tom thought they ought to try to get a deer.

Benton had told them they might try their luck if they had a good chance, but not to waste any ammunition.

A quarter of a mile below them in the valley they saw three mule deer; but the animals were shy and moved off as the boys tried to approach.

"It's no use," said Jim, "we made too much noise, and scared them. Let them go. We might as well start for camp now."

Of birds the boys had seen very few. Many kinds of birds inhabit the Black Hills, but birds are nowhere as numerous in the wilderness of an evergreen forest as they are in broad-leaved trees near towns and farms. Woodpeckers, magpies, and meadow larks, these were all they had seen, when Jim discovered a late nest of crows in a scrubby pine. Without saying a word he was up to the nest and came down with a young crow in his hand.

"What on earth are you going to do with him?" asked Tom.

"Tame him," said Jim. "He's just right, almost ready to fly. I couldn't take my pup, and I couldn't catch a prairie dog, so I'm going to have a crow. I want a pet."

When the boys reached camp, the men had already returned and were frying a pan of venison steak.

"Father, we found the trail, we found the trail!" Jim called out, and then he asked with a little tremor in his voice, as he showed his crow:

"Father, may I keep him? I want a pet."

Hartmann and Brule laughed as the nestling cawed and flapped his wings, but Benton with a smile and a kindly touch in his voice said:

"Certainly, Jim, you may keep him. I'm sorry we couldn't take your pup."

CHAPTER XIX

THE LOST TEPEE

THE party remained for several days at the prairie camp and the men did some more hunting. All the meat had to be dried and smoked and the tedious but very important work of watching the fire and keeping it burning slowly under the drying-frames fell to the boys. In reality much of it fell to Tom, because Jim now had a pet, which took a great deal of his time.

In town or on a farm a pet crow can be easily fed on softened bread, milk curds, potatoes, and all kinds of kitchen scraps; but these ordinary foods were not found in the Black Hills camp.

Jim indeed was very happy and did not know how to thank his father, when he was given permission to draw on the camp supply of flour for his pet. He mixed a stiff batter

of flour and water and, with a small wooden spoon, he put the food in the bird's mouth, but the young creature sat there stupidly holding the food without swallowing it.

"Push it down his throat," Tom told him. "Haven't you ever seen how the old birds push the food 'way down the throat of the youngsters?"

That plan worked and Jim fairly stuffed his pet with little balls of batter. But within less than an hour the young crow again began to caw and wiggle his wings in demand for food.

"Don't stuff him with any more batter," Tom cautioned, "you'll make him sick."

Jim thought this was good advice and changed the food to pieces of raw venison, giving the bird all he wanted to eat.

The crow being now a regular member of the camp, had to have a name and the boys agreed to call him, "Sahpa," the Sioux word for black.

Men and boys who have lived out-doors know that birds and wild creatures are very

inquisitive and have a way of learning and spreading the news of the neighborhood. Some animals, like cats and red squirrels, have a bad reputation amongst the wild birds who always try to drive them from the vicinity of their nests, and it must be acknowledged that crows, although they are very intelligent and make interesting pets, have a bad reputation with the other birds.

It was not long before a pair of kingbirds had discovered that there was a crow in camp, and of all smaller birds the common kingbird is the most aggressive in his hatred of crows. At first the kingbirds just scolded at Sahpa, but soon they pounced upon him, now from one side and then from the other, and if he defended himself against one, the other gave him a vicious peck. So much did they torment him that Jim had to come to the rescue by putting Sahpa under a box.

The men came to camp with some more game, but they had not seen any indication of the prairie on which Tankaheeta had camped. They agreed that the account of

JIM FAIRLY STUFFED HIS PET WITH LITTLE BALLS OF BATTER.
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the young Indian did not refer to the open place on which the Benton party was now camping.

The question as to their new location and the place of Tankaheeta's camp had now become a serious problem.

Both Hartmann and Brule were in doubt about the age of the signs the boys had discovered.

"They may be a year old, or they may be three years old," Brule claimed. "I have seen moose signs which I knew were three years old and which a Michigan hunter declared were only a year old.

"If these signs are more than a year old, they are of no value to us. They would simply mean that some time ago a horse had passed this way; which is not at all impossible. We all know the tales about Indians and whites having been in these mountains."

On their explorations the men had found beaver quite abundant and they felt sure that they could make a fairly good catch of fur, but of gold they had not found a trace, al-

though they had hurriedly examined all good looking streams.

Not one of the three men was at all downhearted. They felt they had accomplished much by getting into the mountains.

The grand and varied scenery found in every direction was also a source of constant inspiration. Black Hills and Bad Lands scenery is all close by, so to speak, and is easily accessible.

In the Black Hills an ever-varying panorama of ridges and peaks, wooded slopes and open valleys, little dreamy Alpine meadows and dark canyons presents itself to the traveler and explorer. Deep wooded valleys radiate in every direction from the central watershed and, although none of the peaks reach the snow-line, several of them are true mountains, reaching a height of more than seven thousand feet.

It was now the month of Canpasapa, the choke-cherry month of the Sioux, and if the men were to do much work before the cold weather set in, they had to select a perma-

nent camp, very soon, in case they could not find Tankaheeta's camp.

Having dried and smoked plenty of meat, and feeling confident that game was fairly abundant all through the mountains, the whole party went together on a trip of exploration, taking provisions for two days. The provisions left in camp were placed on scaffolding in the trees, and the horses they did not take were tethered within reach of plenty of grass and water. Sahpa, of course, had to be taken.

It was the first time the whole party had been off on a side trip and all were in high spirits.

They had been going south about two hours, when they came suddenly upon a grizzly making a meal of the remains of a blacktail, which some panther had killed the preceding night.

Both Benton and Brule fired at the bear, but the big brute fled, as if not hurt, into a densely wooded ravine, where a horseman could not follow. All five men jumped off

their horses and followed on foot, the impetuous Brule ahead, armed with an ax, because he would not take time to reload his gun. Benton had just called to Brule to be careful, when Brule uttered a cry of horror, for the angry wounded beast had risen like a cat from behind a rock and was trying to seize Brule with his massive forepaws. Brule, calling loudly for help, at the same time defended himself bravely against the beast and tried to retreat without stumbling over logs and rocks, and without cutting himself with his own ax. If Benton had not been able to send a bullet through the bear's head, Brule would never have returned to camp alive. As it was, his shirt was torn from his left shoulder and he was bleeding from an ugly gash in his head.

"Now, lads," Benton commanded, after Brule's head was bandaged, "no more chasing after bears or panthers to-day. This is not a hunting-trip; we must locate our permanent camp."

In the afternoon they did strike a good-sized prairie, which extended east and west

and had a fine little stream running through it; but no tepee or sign of campers was to be seen.

"If this is not Tankaheeta's prairie," Benton asserted, "then we have taken the wrong direction.

"We men will follow the northern edge of it; you boys ride along the south side. If this is the place, we ought to be able to find the tepee poles."

"Father, will you hold my crow?" Jim asked, a little sheepishly. "Tom and I want to run a race. We haven't any pack-horses with us now."

Benton took the crow and away galloped the two lads for half a mile, as fast as the horses could go. Jim won the race, but before each party followed the route assigned to them, he came back for his crow.

Every grove and nook that appeared as if it might offer a likely camp-site was carefully examined by either men or boys.

"I can't understand," Tom remarked, after the two lads had been scouting for more than

an hour, "why we haven't found those tepee-poles. We ought to be able to see them a long way off. We're almost at the end of the prairie now. Look, down there the timber comes up close to the creek, and I suppose the creek drops gradually into a canyon as most of the creeks do in these mountains."

The last words Jim had not heard. He had urged his horse into a run and had lost his crow. Now he was halting near some dead-and-down young trees and wildly calling and gesticulating to Tom:

"Make him run, Tom," he cried. "Come quick! Here are the poles! A storm or bear tore them down."

CHAPTER XX

BUILDING A FORT

MANY of the small bands of prospectors and hunters, who went into the Indian country after the Lewis and Clark Expedition, did not surround their tents or cabins with a palisade. The Hudson Bay Company, the American Fur Company and other large companies always surrounded their more important posts with some kind of wall or palisade.

In all the long and bloody history of Indian wars, the Indians never took a fortified post by storm, but many individuals and small bands of hunters and prospectors were killed and robbed.

When the Benton party had transferred their packs to Tankaheeta's camp, a serious discussion arose as to whether they should fortify their camp or not.

Brule was strongly opposed to building any fort.

"You don't need a fort to keep out coyotes and badgers," he argued with strong conviction. "I don't believe there has been an Indian on this prairie, outside of Tankaheeta and his friend, in twenty years. And if you men are going to stay here till your Indian friends call for you, you will stay here forever.

"I say, building a fort here is just wasting a lot of hard work and valuable time. Let's get busy digging for the nuggets now. Then let us go after the beavers during the winter and get out of the country, when we are through with them!"

Benton was inclined to side with Brule, because he was homesick for his wife and children, from whom he could not hear a word till he reached home again.

Tom and Jim were frankly in favor of staying in the hills a long time. Mother had many friends in St. Louis and little Peter was all right as long as he was with Mother.

They hunted both on horseback and on foot; they climbed mountains and discovered beaver-ponds; they fished for suckers and chubs with all the zest of true disciples of old Izaak Walton, and they brought to camp bags of cherries and other wild fruit.

Below the camp they had built a rough dam across the creek and made a swimming-hole, deep and clear, to delight the heart of any boy or man.

Out-door life and daily exercise had made both of the lads strong and hard, and both had only one great wish, that they might stay in the Black Hills a long time.

Hartmann did not agree with Benton and Brule on the question of building a fort.

"You may know the Chippewa and the Cree Indians," he told Brule, "but you don't know the Teton Sioux well enough. They're a big powerful tribe of perhaps ten thousand souls and they are not afraid of the whites. In fact, they think the white people are in their country by permission.

"They have some respect for the officers

and soldiers of the regular army, but have never really felt the power of the United States. They are sure that they could drive all white men out of their country any time they wish to do so."

"But you know," Benton interposed, "that they never go into these mountains."

"They have not in the past," Hartmann continued, "but they will in the future.

"Can't you all guess some of the stories that are being told and retold this summer in every Sioux camp on the whole Missouri River?

"The story of five men who disappeared in the Bad Lands and the story of the ghosts in the canyon of Minnelusa Creek."

"That's the truth," Brule interrupted, "and the Indians will believe the ghost story and keep away from the Black Hills."

"Yes," retorted Hartmann, "most of the Indians will believe it, but very few white men will believe it."

"You know that there are half a dozen white scoundrels living with the Sioux now,

fellows who ought to be hanged, if there were any courts to hang them. One of these white renegades can easily gather half a dozen or more Indian outlaws about him if he can tell them a plausible story of some easy booty. A murder or two adds zest to the enterprise. Sort of makes it a regular war-party in their eyes.

"Benton, if such a party ever catches us off our guard and unprotected, they'll rob us till we look like Adam in Paradise and then they'll kill us to complete their adventure.

"Comrades, take my word for it. The story of five men disappearing and slipping into the Black Hills, into a mysterious and forbidden land, is too exciting not to stir up something.

"I say we build a fort, although it will be hard work and take lots of time."

There was a long silence after Hartmann had spoken. "Well, boys, I guess we had better build a fort," Benton decided. "Hartmann is the soldier of our crowd and I think he is right."

Now began a time of hard work for the whole party. The men cut trees on a nearby slope and the boys, each driving a horse, dragged the logs to the selected spot.

The hardest part of the work was digging the trench in which the logs were to be set for the stockade, but the men improvised a wooden plow, which facilitated the hard and tedious work very much.

The fort was built in the shape of an oblong, having a dimension of about twenty by thirty feet. In one corner they built a log cabin, and in the corner diagonally across, a spring was enclosed, so that in case of a siege, they would not have to expose themselves in getting water.

Benton and Brule wanted to build the fort near the bluff in the shade of some trees, but Hartmann decided for a spot on the open prairie.

"You don't want to build a fort," he said, "where the enemy can hide behind rocks and trees and shoot at you with perfect safety to

himself. Build it where he has to come out in the open and expose himself."

When it came to placing the port-holes, Hartmann's military experience again proved of great value. Brule started cutting a port-hole five feet from the ground.

"That won't do, French," the ex-soldier told him. "If you cut them that low, an enemy may crawl up at night, poke his guns through your port-holes and kill us all or make us give up the whole fort. Cut your port-holes ten feet high."

"You can't reach them, Dutch," Brule objected.

"We build a platform around the inside so that we can reach them, but no enemy can reach them from the outside."

Benton and Brule were going to place the battens, which are needed to close up the cracks between the upright logs, on the inside of the stockade, but Hartmann convinced them that these small timbers should be placed on the outside.

"If you place them on the inside," he explained to his friends, "a bullet striking one may be deflected into the stockade and kill somebody, while if you place them outside, they will deflect bullets against the heavy timbers, where they can do no harm."

Another piece of very hard work was sawing boards with a whip-saw, which is a big saw drawn by two men. For this purpose the logs are placed on a high frame and one man stands on the log and the other stands under the log. The large trading-posts on the Missouri in those days did already make use of portable saw-mills, but the Benton party could not take anything heavier than a sweep-saw. With this important tool the men cut rough boards for the port-hole platform, for the floor of their cabin, for the roof, and for cradles and sluices to be used in their mining operations. This hard work the men did early in the morning, before the heat became oppressive.

If the men had been building their fort in the forests of Wisconsin or Michigan, they

would have used cedar bark for the roof of their cabin, but cedars are not found in the Black Hills.

On the last of July the fort was done and the men were much pleased with their work.

"It's as good a fort as a company of soldiers could have built," Hartmann pronounced. "There are no dead angles about it. Our fire can reach every inch of ground around it."

CHAPTER XXI

THE GOLD-DIGGERS

HAD the men in the Benton party known more about the climate of the Black Hills, they might have put off building their fort until later in the season, for placer-mining requires an abundant supply of water and August and September are generally dry months in the hills, when many of the smaller creeks stop running.

It is, however, almost proverbial that in gold-mining fortune has favored the tenderfoot and has played no end of tricks on the seasoned and experienced prospector.

While August and September are usually dry, small local showers occur here and there almost daily. In dry seasons the rain from these showers often does not reach the ground. One can see the gray streaks of rain

pour out of a small cloud, but it evaporates before it reaches the ground.

The Benton party, however, was favored by a season of abundant local showers that actually reached the ground, so that nearly all the streams continued to run, although with a somewhat diminished flow. Had the men struck a very dry season, many of the smaller streams would have been dry runs, and the grass would have been dead and sunburnt.

The men first tried the most primitive kind of gold-mining, known as panning. For this purpose, they made wooden pans with sloping sides. These pans they filled with sand and gravel and then turned and tilted them, back and forth, right and left, under a good current of water, till the dirt was all washed out.

This plan, like every other plan of washing gold, is based on the principle that gold is much heavier than either water or rock. It is, in fact, about twenty times as heavy as water and three to four times heavier than ordinary rock and sand.

So when the pan is tilted and rotated under

a strong current, the gravel, sand, and fine dirt are washed away, but the fine gold-dust and the little nuggets remain at the bottom of the pan.

The men first tried the place, where Tankaheeta had found the three little nuggets.

"Now, men," Benton encouraged them, "let's go to it! But remember, we started out to explore the hills and break away from the fur business. We have done both. Now, if we do find some dust and nuggets, we're in luck; if the gold-mining fizzles, don't get blue."

"That's my sentiment," assented Hartmann. "I never thought I would get into this game, when I first handled my mother's dishpan. But it's just a game, Benton, and I don't give a rip how it turns out. It beats sorting and packing bull-skins and looking after drunken Indians at Fort Pierre."

Brule, with his more excitable temper, was not so calm at the prospect of wealth or failure.

"We'll deeg out that gold if it's here," he

exclaimed with a slight French accent and with some of his favorite French interjections, "and no 'Injun' is going to take it away from us. I'll pile rocks on them before they get mine."

"French, you are falling into your murderous mood again. Better watch your pan," Hartmann joked, with a laugh, "or you will never have a nugget to tempt an Indian."

Again and again, the men filled their pans, and picking out the larger stones and pebbles by hand, washed away sand and dirt, but the big shining nuggets, which Brule had expected, did not appear. When each man had filled and washed out his pan half a dozen times, Benton proposed that they carefully dry the little heavy sand at the bottom of their pans and find out, if they were getting any gold at all.

They put the pans in the sun to dry, then they stirred the small amount of dry deposit and carefully blew away the light sand and dirt.

Brule was the first to break the silence.

"Great hills!" he cried. "Men, we've found it, we've found it. Look in my pan!!!"

Both men and boys were at Brule's pan in a minute.

"Here they are, here they are!" he cried, excitedly. "See them! Look!" and he pointed out two small nuggets about the size of a pinhead.

There was much joy in camp that night, for all three of them had found some gold in their pans.

"We shall do better to-morrow," was the hope of all three. "We are new at the business."

None of the men had ever had any experience in any kind of mining. All they knew about it, they had learned from the talk and stories of prospectors, who had been in the Rocky Mountains, and who came for supplies or for spending the winter to the trading posts of the fur company.

"We have to dig a pailful," Brule stated, as they put the washings of several days into a deerskin bag.

"They burn that bag at the assay office," Hartmann explained, "so none of the fine dust is lost."

If Brule had known more about the weight and value of gold, he would not have been so sure about digging a pailful. A large pailful of gold-dust and nuggets would weigh between seven hundred and a thousand pounds and would make heavy loads for three or four pack-horses.

The time during which the fort was being built and the days of gold-washing were days of regular work for everybody in camp, except Sahpa, the crow. Indeed during the first few days Sahpa added to the work and the trouble of the boys, but also contributed not a little to the amusement and consequent good-humor of the men.

He soon learned to swallow his food and even to help himself, but he seemed to forget that his sleeping-place was in a box on the ground. His idea of a proper sleeping-place for a crow led him to work his way up among the branches of the nearest pine. When Jim

called him he answered with a most appealing "Caw, caw," but he would not come down. He seemed to say, "No, no. You come up here." At least Brule interpreted his caws in that way. Several times Jim had to climb after Sahpa and bring him down. On two occasions he flew to another tree, before Jim could reach him and Tom had to climb the second tree while Jim was waiting in the first tree for fear that Sahpa might once more change his mind in regard to the most suitable tree before he was caught.

"Why can't I let him sleep in the tree?" Jim asked his father on the first occasion of Sahpa's escape.

"I think," his father explained, "he will grow wild and leave you if you do. Some crows will come by before we get up and he will go with them. Then it will be 'good-by' to your pet."

"If that crow doesn't bring me a good nugget," Hartmann declared, one evening, "I'll have him sold for debt, when we get back to St. Louis. Three valuable buttons have dis-

appeared off my shelf and I bet he knows where they are and—''

''Dutch,'' Brule interposed, ''when you set him up at auction, I'm going to put in a claim; he is using more of my soap for eating than I use for washing, and soap is worth more in these mountains than buttons. You can use nails, if you run out of buttons.''

But when Sahpa began to pick knowingly in Brule's pan, where some gold dust was drying, Brule vowed that he would wring the neck of the black thief.

''Open his bill,'' he called to Jim, who had rescued him. ''He's got my biggest nugget hidden under his tongue. I'll cut his head off if I don't get it back.''

And Sahpa being searched was found guilty. He had the nugget under his tongue.

After that he was not allowed near the pans.

The men soon found that their diggings were not rich. With hard, steady work, they could each earn from three to four dollars a day, but that was all.

So they discarded their pans and built what

is known as a rocker. A miner's rocker is a long box with a sieve at the upper end and with cleats or riffles on the bottom. Behind the riffles the heavy particles of gold and heavy sand are caught as a strong current of water washes the lighter sand and gravel over them. The box is so placed on a platform or in some other way that it can be rocked back and forth.

Three or more men can work to advantage on a rocker. One carries the gravel to the rocker. Another operates the simple contrivance and picks out the large stones, and the third man dips or carries water, but the Benton party had built their rocker in such a way that a wooden spout carried the water to the rocker.

From time to time, the rocker is cleaned out and the color, as the miners call it, is dried and the sand blown away. By means of the rocker, the men could make about five dollars a day each.

Benton and Hartmann were satisfied with the result, but Brule was not.

"Let us find a place where we can do sluicing," he advised. "By the hard work we are putting in, we ought to do better."

"Find the place," Benton told him, "and we'll go and try it."

CHAPTER XXII

GUARDING THE FORT

BRULE did find the place where sluicing would be possible. In one of the streams northwest of Harney Peak he discovered pay-dirt and an abundant flow of water.

It was decided that the three men should take half a dozen horses and establish a temporary camp on this stream, which the men called Pebble Creek. The horses not needed were left on the Home Prairie. The boys were not to remain with the men at Pebble Creek. Ever since the establishment of the camp on Gold Creek, the lads had wanted to explore the highest mountain of the Black Hills, now known as Harney Peak. All three men wanted to join in this exploration, but there never was any time for it. No route to the mountain was known, but the men had

been as far as the Needles on one of their early hunting trips. It is easy to follow a well-marked trail to a mountain peak, but to find or make a trail is a very different matter, and no one could tell whether it would take one or two or several days to find a practical route to the peak.

If the three men had been compelled to do for the Fur Company the hard work they performed in moving to Pebble Creek, they would have felt very much abused, but carrying through an adventure of their own was different. They worked from daylight to dawn, they packed provisions and tools and lumber on the horses; and where trees and other obstructions made it impossible for the horses to get through with their loads of boards for the sluices, the men cheerfully carried the lumber on their own backs. They were like boys who are playing a game, and who will build shacks, dig caves, and walk ten miles for a swim as long as it is a game.

Arrived at the creek, the men set at once to work building their sluice, consisting of two

long boxes. The upper end of the upper box was provided with a coarse sieve, while the lower box was provided with a number of riffles crossing the box. Behind these riffles, the heavy gold-dust and nuggets become lodged, while the lighter dirt, sand, and gravel are carried away by the strong current of water.

There was not grass enough on Pebble Creek for six horses, so the boys had to take four of them back to the prairie of Sahpa Creek.

The men built two drags. To each drag a horse was hitched, and while Brule and Hartmann were busy hauling gravel and dirt to the sluices, Benton looked after the washing of the material. It was the hardest work they had ever done. All day they worked with pick and shovel, wet and muddy up to their waist, but none complained; it was a game, their own game.

And the horses, too, faithful helpers of man in play and work, peace and war, drudgery and adventure, had no easy time of it. For

two or three hours at noon they could do as they pleased. They rolled on the grass, drank their fill of cool water, and, if the flies were not too bad, they picked a fair meal of grass and brush, while the men rested and had their noon meal of venison and tea. Most of their feeding the horses had to do at night, when Brule always picketed them within reach of both grass and water. Only the hardy so-called grass-horses of the Western plains can do any work under such conditions. A horse used to regular rations of grain and good hay would not have lasted long at the Pebble Creek camp.

Every other day, the men had a clean-up. They collected, dried, and cleaned the heavy dirt accumulated behind the riffles in their lower sluice. To Brule the results were again disappointing, for even with the hard toil they were undergoing day after day, they could not make more than five or six dollars to a man.

Tenderfeet that they were in placer-mining, they quickly learned much by experience.

They found that the best pay-dirt lay generally close to bed-rock in the creek-bottoms and that the gravel near the heads of streams was generally richer than that farther down; but the original source of the gold was a mystery to them; and it is to some extent a mystery to this day. Certain matters, however, connected with gold-mining, which were riddles to the early miners and prospectors are now well understood by the mining engineers.

The gold which has been found in sands and gravel of the Black Hills, California, and Alaska was originally deposited in solid rock. In most cases it was embedded in veins of hard quartz in the shape of minute particles, threads, or small nuggets. During the long ages past, streams and frosts have broken up the veins of quartz and other rock. The free gold has weathered out, and as it does not rust or corrode, either in water or air, as iron and most other metals do, it is found to-day in the deposits of sand and gravel of creeks and rivers, where it was left perhaps thousands of years ago. A little gold occurs in the

sands of many rivers, but the amount is so small that it does not pay to extract it.

Placer mines have often been called the poor man's mines, because they can be worked without expensive machinery. A pan, a shovel, and plenty of water are the only things absolutely necessary. The gold in the placers occurs in the shape of dust, flakes, and nuggets, the latter varying in size from that of a pin-head to that of a hazel-nut. Larger nuggets are not common, and very large nuggets, weighing many pounds, are exceedingly rare. The Welcome Nugget found in Australia, which weighed over 20,000 ounces, is the largest ever found.

As Benton and his men were doing well on Pebble Creek they decided to stay there as long as the supply of water lasted, or until the beginning of cold weather.

This made it necessary for the boys to look after the horses and after the camp on Sahpa Creek, as they had begun to call the creek at their permanent camp. The boys did not like the plan, because they had not expected to

camp by themselves in the wild mountains; but there was no way out of it. The horses, except two, had to stay on Sahpa Creek, because there was not enough grass on Pebble Creek, and somebody had to look after them so that they would not wander away or be harassed by beasts of prey.

Nor did the men feel that the fort should be left vacant. The grass was getting dry enough to burn. If lightning started a prairie fire, their fort might burn down and the winter pasture for their horses would be destroyed.

Moreover, all three of the men had a vague feeling that some Indians, possibly under the leadership of a white man might come into the hills and find their fort.

"I don't like to have you boys leave us," Benton expressed himself with sorrow, "but it must be done. You can be a real help to us now, for we must work at this placer as long as possible. Look well after the horses, explore the mountains as much as you please,

and if you discover any signs of Indians, let us know as soon as possible."

When the boys were ready to mount their horses, he put his arms around each boy's neck, shook his hand and with a choking voice he spoke his parting words:

"Good-by, boys! God bless you, and keep you in good health and good spirits! You come back Saturday night to spend Sunday with us."

"Good-by, father!" the boys called, just before the trail led into a thicket of young pines. They had put on a bold front, but when they were alone among the pines each felt a lump rising in his throat.

CHAPTER XXIII

CLIMBING THE HIGHEST PEAK

AT the home camp the lads found everything in good shape. The horses seemed to be content to stay on Sahpa Prairie. When the sun was very hot, they stood under some trees at the foot of the hills, or behind one of the walls of the palisade, or found both a cool bath and a cool drink in the boys' swimming-hole.

Tom had some news, when he returned after having looked at the drove, while Jim was getting supper ready.

"I'll have a better pet than you have," he teased Jim. "The black mare has a fine colt, and he's going to be mine. So you needn't feel cocky any more about your old crow."

"I wouldn't give you my crow for a dozen colts," Jim retorted. "A colt is no good for a pet. You can't do anything with him. He

will just be a lot of trouble, and if you don't look out, the bears will get him or the panthers."

The boys now planned to find a trail to Harney Peak, and if possible to climb to its summit. They took their blankets, food for three days, and two canteens filled with water. They knew the route as far as the eagles' nest at the Needles.

Toward the northeast they saw what seemed to be the highest mountain, only a few miles away.

"That must be Tankaheeta's Peak," Tom asserted. "It certainly looks to be a good deal higher than any other mountain we can see. We ought to reach it in an hour."

Tom was in favor of leaving the horses at the Needles, but Jim urged that it would be better to take them as far as possible.

"We can travel by compass through these open woods," he claimed, "just as well on horseback, as on foot."

Tom thought that there would be no water for the horses high up on the mountain, but

Jim reminded him that springs were sometimes found high on a hillside, so they continued on horseback.

The country was remarkably open and many of the pines were dead, although the boys saw no signs of recent forest fires. Having learned to be interested in all kinds of wood-lore they examined some trees that seemed to be dying and found that thousands of small beetles had bored holes and tunnels in the bark and had completely girdled the dying trees.

These small bark-boring beetles do great damage in the Black Hills, whenever there occurs a succession of very dry years. In seasons of abundant rainfall, the increase of the pest is checked by the flow of rosin in the vigorously growing trees. In the summer of 1915, a season of very generous rainfall, thousands of these injurious beetles could be discovered, drowned in rosin in their own tunnels.

If the lads had really expected to reach the peak in an hour, they were much disappointed.

They rode up-hill and down-hill again and again, until Jim claimed that they were not getting up any higher at all. Several times they had to change their route on account of steep slopes, and without a compass they could not have kept their direction. Now, they rode down slopes so steep that it was difficult to keep from slipping over the heads of their horses. A few minutes later, they came to an ascent where the horses had to exert themselves to the utmost.

After they had been traveling for two hours, they came to a shady growth of spruce and pines mixed, and there, trickling down the hillside, ran a fine spring. The horses were so thirsty that the boys could hardly keep them back till they themselves had had a drink. The famished animals quickly drained the small basin of the spring, but it filled up again within a few minutes.

While the lads rested a short time, they heard a thrush and a blue-headed grosbeak singing faintly in the spruce thickets, below them. The season was too far advanced to

hear the mountain songsters at their best.

As the lads continued to ascend, they began to feel slightly the effect of the high elevation.

"It feels as if my lips were swelling," Jim remarked. "We must be 10,000 feet up in the air now."

"No, Jim," Tom corrected him, "the peak isn't that high. It would be snow-covered if it were."

Quite unexpectedly, they came to an elongated ridge of granite, and a kind of game-trail which they had been following led around to the west side of it.

"Jim, this is the Peak," exclaimed Tom. "We're there."

"But we can't reach the summit from this side."

To their left rose a sheer wall of overhanging rock, a hundred feet high, while on their right, a steep wooded slope seemed to drop a thousand feet or more.

They turned back and picketed their horses on the west side of the ridge.

Tom cut a sapling and leaned it against the steep wall. "Follow me up," he told Jim.

From the sapling both lads clambered on all fours up a kind of steep rocky ditch, their hearts beating fast with exertion and anticipation. Could they make the granite pinnacles above them?

Suddenly, their path turned to the left and both lads uttered a cry of surprise. They looked upon a little Alpine meadow dotted with daisies and enclosed by a grayish pink wall of granite crags. And, as if to complete the miracle, a cool spring shaded by a scrubby spruce, trickled through a gap in the rock.

They did not stop to drink, for beyond the meadow the granite wall rose another twenty-feet, but the highest point was not difficult of access to sure-footed boys.

Now, they stood on the very summit. Two steps ahead the mountain dropped. Afraid to walk to the edge, they lay down and looked over. They were now on the crest of the hundred-foot wall which they had seen from

below, but viewed from above it rose to a dizzy height.

Jim was the first to break the silence.

"Tom," he spoke in a low voice, "look, the whole world lies below us!"

The boys naturally turned their eyes toward the east and southeast, the direction from which they entered the hills.

"I think I can see Sheep Mountain," Jim declared. "It must be that dark patch surrounded by a white wall."

The view from Harney Peak is indeed worth a long journey. The Bad Lands of South Dakota, although from fifty to a hundred miles away, stand out like a clear bird's-eye picture, while almost below the observer the vast wooded valleys and gorges of the Black Hills radiate in all directions, giving striking evidence of the enormous amount of rock the streams have carried away.

Around Harney Peak rise several lower peaks, their summits showing the characteristic crown of granite spires and knobs.

The view toward the west stands out in

marked contrast to that of the east. The plain west of the hills is not visible, for a ridge five or six thousand feet high joins the sky-line, while between it and Harney Peak is spread out a magnificent panorama of dark, forested slopes, mountains, and valleys.

When the boys had recovered from the overwhelming grandeur and beauty of the scene, they ate their lunch on the summit. The sun was just sinking behind the western ridge, a few martins and swifts were still sailing around the peak, and a friendly little chipmunk came out of his hiding-place to inspect his strange visitors, and boldly made a meal of the scraps the boys offered him.

Harney Peak is the highest mountain in the Black Hills, reaching an altitude of 7250 feet. The spring on the meadow is flowing to this day. It is undoubtedly the highest spring in North America east of the Rocky Mountains.

The lads watered their horses where the spring trickled down the granite wall and picketed them for the night.

Then they climbed back to the summit to

watch the daylight fade away over peaks and valleys and distant plains and long after the stars had come out with silvery brightness from a dark-blue sky, they rolled up in their blankets on the rock-sheltered meadow.

CHAPTER XXIV

HUNTING A PANTHER

JIM had had his little troubles with Sahpa on the trip to Harney Peak. The boy was most perplexed, however, when the time came for his pet to go to sleep. There was no box and Sahpa would not stay on the open meadow. At last, Jim put him in the scrub spruce near the spring, and as this was the only tree on the summit, Sahpa was satisfied and soon was asleep with his beak tucked under his wing.

When the two explorers returned to their camp late in the afternoon, of the next day, the horses were bunched near the stockade and acted wild and excited.

"There is something wrong," both lads agreed.

"Maybe the Indians are after us again," Tom suggested.

"Maybe it's bears or panthers after your colt," Jim gave as his opinion.

The animals seemed glad to see the boys return, for when the two horsemen came in sight, they threw up their heads, began to neigh, and came trotting and galloping along as if to welcome their friends, all except the black mare, she came on a walk, with the little brown colt clinging close to his mother's side.

"What in the world has happened? Look at the mare's shoulder; some beast has given her two vicious scratches," exclaimed Jim.

The mare was still so much excited that when Tom approached to pat the colt, she tried to bite him and struck at him with her forefeet.

When she had been quieted, so that the boys could examine and clean her wounds, they found the skin on her right shoulder cut by two gashes that looked as if they had been made with a knife.

"Hang it," Tom cried angrily, "if it doesn't look as if an Indian had cut her with a knife."

"Indian, nothing!" retorted Jim, rejecting his brother's opinion, "an Indian wouldn't have cut her, he would have stolen her and all the rest of the drove. Mark my words, we'll have our hands full now, with panthers and bears and wolves."

"I'm glad none of them can catch Sahpa, but they'll get your Brownie, if you don't look out."

"They won't get him to-night," Tom vowed, "because Brownie and Blackie are going to sleep in the fort."

After supper, when the mare and her colt were safe in the stockade, the boys figured out the story of the mare's wounds. A panther had tried to carry away the colt and the mare had bravely fought him off. The big cat had missed in his spring at her throat, but had struck her a glancing blow on the shoulder.

"If that panther shows his yellow hide around here," Tom promised, "I'm going to get him."

"I don't think Father would want us to hunt panthers," Jim objected; "we might get

hurt or killed, and we can't find him, anyhow. If I could have taken my dog, we could hunt panthers, for he would drive the panther up a tree, where we could shoot him."

"Well, if I find him, I'm going after him," Tom persisted, and he loaded his gun and even sharpened his hunting-knife.

"All right," Jim frankly admitted, "I'm afraid to hunt panthers, while Father and the men are not here.

"You can hunt panthers; I'll stay in the fort and be cook."

In the morning, Tom proposed that they go and try to find the place where Blackie had the fight with the panther.

"Perhaps Blackie killed him," he said, "and we will not have to fight him."

They rode along the south side of the prairie, where the stands of large and small pine extend down to the foot of the ridge, and where prairie and forest separate so abruptly as if the line had been established by man.

They stopped at a grove where the horses

often stood or lay down, when they were not feeding. The creek ran close by this grove and if there was no breeze to drive away the flies, they could brush them off in a thicket of young growth.

Looking for signs of a fight, Tom dismounted, but Jim would not get off his horse.

"I'm afraid of those cats," he again told his brother, "but if you are bound to hunt them, I'll be game."

The ground was trampled and cut up more than usual, and, although Tom could find no trace of blood, a small tree on the edge of the young timber appeared freshly broken.

By this time Jim's crow had perched on the top of a dead poplar and set up an excited "Caw, caw." Sahpa had already made some reputation for himself as a woodland reporter. All of his discoveries, whether it was an owl, a skunk, a rattlesnake, or a badger, he announced in his own crow language.

"Tom, get back on your horse," Jim cautioned. "Sahpa has found something in the

brush, and it's something he doesn't like or he wouldn't make so much noise."

Tom mounted his horse and rode up to the edge of the thicket.

"Great Scott," he whispered. "I see the head of the beast, he is lying flat on the ground, like a cat," and without uttering another word, he took a quick aim and fired. The next moment he turned his horse to ride away.

The panther gave a growl of pain and rage and before Tom could get a good start, the beast rushed out of the thicket and sprang on the back of his horse, which staggered under the suddenly added weight, and in wild fright threw its rider to the ground.

For a second, it looked as though the rider and horse might be clawed to death, but either in terror, or with rare presence of mind, Jim rode up and fired, with the muzzle of his gun almost touching the side of the clawing panther. The beast dropped to the ground and the boys fled to a safe distance, too scared to look around.

WITH RARE PRESENCE OF MIND, JIM RODE UP AND FIRED.—*Page 224.*

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TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

Tom, who was on foot turned first.

"Come back, Jim," he shouted, "I think he's dead. Load your gun."

As soon as Jim could turn his frightened horse he came back. The panther seemed to be dead, but the boys fired two more shots into him before they dared to touch him.

"We'll nail his miserable hide to our fort," said Tom, "but no more panther-hunts for me."

"No more for me, either," Jim assented.

Tom's shirt was torn off his back. His horse which had run home was badly lacerated, and if it had not been for the protection of the saddle its vitals would have been laid bare.

"You said you were afraid of panthers, and now you killed one. It was a mighty brave thing to do," was Tom's praise of his brother.

"Oh, it wasn't bravery," Jim laughed. "I didn't know what else to do and I had no time to think. I was scared worse than you, and I'll never go near one of those beasts again."

The panther was a big old male, that had probably been roaming by himself. Panthers and other beasts of prey have a great deal of respect for full-grown horses and cattle, but are very destructive to colts, calves, and pigs.

Cows and mares, however, will fight to the end for their young. A horse uses both his forefeet and hindfeet as formidable clubs, and his jaws, worked by powerful muscles, act like a crushing vice. Cattle depend on their horns and the crushing power of their forefeet and massive hoofs. Cattle and horses are able to return to the wild state and take care of themselves, but sheep, unless looked after by a herder, are soon killed off by beasts of prey.

Great herds of wild horses used to roam over the Western and Southwestern plains, especially in Texas. These horses were all descended from animals brought to America by white men. Neither the Peruvians nor the Mexicans, nor our North American Indians originally had any horses.

The boys kept their promise about not

hunting any more panthers. Once before the end of the week they rode around the greater part of the prairie, but when Sahpa again found something exciting in a thicket, the lads contented themselves with just sending a shot into the bushes, hoping to scare away any panther or bear that might be the cause of Sahpa's excitement. The trouble with Sahpa, as reporter and scout, was that it was impossible to tell what he had discovered. It might be anything from a grizzly bear to a red squirrel peacefully shelling a pine cone on a dead log.

When the boys arrived at Pebble Creek camp, the following Saturday night, they had, of course, a great story to tell.

"Don't hunt panthers and grizzlies," the men all advised them. "Drive them off the prairie, if they show themselves, but don't follow them into the timber."

On Sunday, the men did not work at sluicing gold. They washed and mended their clothes, took a swim and told stories. The only book in camp was a Bible, which

Mrs. Benton had packed for them, and Benton conducted a simple Sunday service by reading a chapter or two about the Children of Israel or King David in the wilderness, for these great epic stories seemed to tell of a life similar to that led by the men and boys in their party.

The Sunday dinner, although it was surely simple enough, was nevertheless an occasion to which all looked forward. Hartmann always was the cook, and pancakes and tea, both sweetened with sugar, were the great treats. During the week, the men and boys lived on game, varied only by a small allowance of bacon and beans. Condensed milk and many other luxuries of camp life were not on the market in those days.

CHAPTER XXV

THE END OF SUMMER

IN this manner the summer wore away. The moon of Wasuntan, the Harvest Moon, passed into the Rice Moon, although there are no marshes in the Black Hills, where this wild grain of the Indians can grow.

The hot days of August were followed by the cool and balmy days of September. The chipmunks were busy carrying all kinds of seeds into their dens. The red squirrels laid in their hoards of pine cones and hazel-nuts and the forests became even more silent than in midsummer, for most of the birds had departed. Only the meadow-larks still sang now and then on the prairie, and magpies and crows still chattered, cawed on the creeks, living on such pickings as panthers and other four-footed hunters left them.

Both men and boys had explored a large part of the hills, and the men had occupied a sluicing camp farther north, where they had discovered a richer stream.

There are several large caves in the Black Hills, and one of them half a day's ride from their camp the boys had explored for some distance.

All large caves are found in limestone rock, and are the work of underground streams that have dissolved and eroded the limestone.

For exploring the cave each boy took a supply of candles and some pieces of charcoal.

A few hundred yards from the entrance the cave was pitch-dark and the boys had to light their way carefully over fallen and broken rock, which filled the dry and deserted bed of the stream. All kinds of fantastic formations of limestone in the shape of icicles, flowers, and lacework glistened in the dim light of the candles, while the darkness and silence in the cave were so oppressive that the boys were almost afraid to speak to each other.

From time to time they drew large dark arrows on the walls, pointing in the direction of the entrance, because they were afraid that on their return they might otherwise lose their way into some of the blind tunnels.

About half a mile in, they saw light through a small hole on their left. They pushed away some of the loose rock and found that they had discovered another entrance, which had been entirely hidden by rock and debris fallen down from above. A quarter of a mile farther on the cave became so narrow that they could have advanced only by crawling on their stomachs.

"I think we have gone far enough," Tom advised. "These rocks hang as if they might fall down any moment and crush us like mice under a brick."

Jim also was satisfied that they had explored enough of the cave.

"Our candles might go out, if we crawl through that small hole and then we might never find our way out again, and nobody would ever rescue us, because the men do not

know where we are. I think we have seen enough of this cave."

"But wouldn't it be a fine place to hide if the Indians ever get after us?" asked Tom.

"They surely couldn't get us as long as we had plenty of water and enough to eat, but I would rather fight them from our fort," Jim answered.

About the beginning of November, the men returned to the home camp, for it had now grown too cold for sluicing and they were to trap beaver during the winter months. From time to time, both men and boys had to put in a day hunting to keep the camp supplied with both fresh and smoked meat. Game was fairly abundant and not wild, because it had never been hunted. Both blacktail and white-tail deer were common and very fat. They also saw elk, a few buffaloes, antelope, and mountain sheep, but the antelope and mountain sheep were so wild that the hunters did not try to get any.

During the winter, both the men and the boys trapped beavers on many streams.

None of the party really liked trapping, but they felt that they ought to work enough to make a day's wages whenever the weather permitted it.

The snowfall in the Black Hills is not so great as in the forest country around Lake Superior, nor is the cold very severe or lasting. It was only during the months of December and January, the Hard Moon, as the Indians call the latter, that the party spent much time in their home camp. At such periods they cut wood, repaired harness and saddles, told long stories, and slept as much as they pleased.

Naturally they discussed much their plans of getting out of the hills. By perseverance and steady application, they had done quite well at their mining work. They had not nearly secured a water-pail full of gold, but they did have a bagful about as heavy as Jim or Tom could carry, although the bag looked very small.

"Boys, we have made good wages by our hard work, and that is enough," Benton re-

proved them, when the other two men were inclined to grumble at their poor luck. "And think of the glorious life and time we have had!" he added.

The horses were coming through the winter in fine shape, especially Blackie and her colt. For these two Tom had cut some hay, and on very stormy days, or when the snow had drifted too badly for little Brownie to paw his way through to the stem-cured grass, Tom fed him and the mare inside the stockade. The black mare was well able to take care of herself, but the woolly brown colt was restless and would not eat, if he was alone in the stockade.

A horse accustomed to feed on grain and in a good barn would have died of cold and hunger on Sahpa Prairie, but to these range-horses, accustomed to the winters on the open plain, the winter in the Black Hills, with an abundance of trees and rocks for shelter, brought no serious hardship. They had all grown a heavy coat of hair, and when the grass failed them, they fed on brush and the

boys kept the creek open for them, so they did not have to eat snow to quench their thirst.

The wounds on Blackie and on Tom's horse had completely healed, although the boys had done nothing for the wounds except that they had cleaned them and put on some medicine to keep off the flies.

Sahpa had become quite domesticated and wise in many things. Once he alighted on the hot sheet-iron stove, but he remembered the incident so well that he never perched on the stove again. When the first snow had fallen, Sahpa was much interested in the white blanket, picking at it and eating some of it, but very soon he came back into the cabin. When the boys rode out to hunt or to look after the horses, the crow always went along. Generally he flew from one tree to the other, all the time keeping an eye on his masters, and when the boys stopped for lunch Sahpa invariably appeared to claim his share of the meal.

There was naturally much speculation in

camp as to the probability of the party being discovered again by Indians.

If all went well, they intended to begin mining for gold again as soon as the streams were open, and leave the hills some time in July or August.

In their trapping, they had also been quite successful, having secured about five hundred pounds of skins, mostly beaver, but also a few mink, wildcat, and lynx.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DESPERATE SITUATION

AT the beginning of the month of April, the Wild Goose Moon of the Sioux, the streams were again open, the prairies began to show the first signs of green, and in the woods the shad-bush had hung out its white flowers.

The men moved again to their North Camp, northwest of Harney Peak, a stiff day's ride from Sahpa Prairie. Four horses, the men took with them, while the other six and the colt were to remain near the house camp. In the camp the men left enough dried meat and other provisions to last the whole party a month, but there was only enough hay to feed all the horses about a week.

Each of the five members of the party was provided with a gun and a pistol, and as all had been exceedingly careful in the use of

lead and powder, they were not short of ammunition.

The men were for some time in doubt as to the best disposition of their gold. Brule thought they ought to take it with them to their northern camp, but the other two men thought that plan involved too many risks of losing it.

"Why not hide it somewhere in the woods?" Hartmann asked.

"That is not safe, either," Benton thought. "A bear might accidentally find it in looking for ants or grubs and scatter it over the hill-side. In that case much would be lost, for we certainly never could recover all the fine dust."

At last they decided to put it in a can and bury it in that corner of the stockade, where they tied their horses, whenever they brought any of them into the stockade.

"It is the least likely place in which any-body would look for it," Benton declared. "We are going to come back to this camp, before we leave the hills, and we know that

we shall have a chance to dig it out. If we hid it in the woods, something might happen that we could not go after it."

It was of course necessary for the boys to remain again as guards of the home camp. All realized that it was a duty involving a great deal of danger. If any Indians came into the hills again, they would most likely appear after they had finished their spring hunt; and they might come from the north, west or east, while from the south there seemed no practicable route.

"Be sure, boys," Benton told the lads, "that you never go away without locking the gate, and under no conditions admit either Indian or white man to the fort.

"If you discover any sign of Indians, make a big smudge fire toward evening of every other day, and we will look for that signal from the high hill above our camp. One Saturday you come to our camp and the next Saturday one of us will come home.

"If any Indians appear, get the horses into the stockade if you can, but don't expose your-

selves to getting shot. If necessary, let the horses go."

"And you need not be afraid of standing a siege," Hartmann added. "They will not try to rush in, but if they should, you must give them a few well-aimed shots. Of course you will have to take turns watching at night. But just don't get scared. We have a good fort, which one good man can hold against a whole bunch of reds. They never did take a fort by assault; it isn't their kind of fighting."

"Yes," Benton took the word again, "if it comes to the worst, boys, fight and hold out. Remember, if you are not in our camp on your Saturday by midnight, we shall know that something is wrong and shall start at once to relieve you."

No boys ever looked forward with greater pleasure to a game than did Jim and Tom to their company of Saturdays and Sundays.

Early on their Saturday, the cabin was swept, the dishes washed and they started on a quick trip to the North Camp. On the next

Saturday their visitor always appeared in camp for supper; but generally all three men came down, bringing their gold with them.

Every one in the party was now getting homesick, even the boys thought they had had enough of camping and had seen enough of the hills, however, the men were doing so well that they wished to keep on digging while the digging was good.

In one respect the Benton party was far more fortunate than many a party of explorers or prospectors. There was never any real quarrel or bitter feeling in camp. Benton had been chosen as the leader, and when he had made a decision on a disputed point, the matter was settled. Hartmann, as an old soldier, was accustomed to obey orders, and Brule always fell good-naturedly into line.

"I'll tell you what we shall do," Benton told them all one Sunday afternoon, as the men were lying in the shade of some big yellow pines, "we will leave the hills on August first. That ought to give us plenty of time to reach St. Louis before winter, even if we

should have to go all the way on horseback."

"I bet little Peter won't know any of us," remarked Jim. "We are all as brown as real Indians, and you men have beards like the robbers in our old picture-book."

Next morning, while the boys saw the men off a few miles, Jim ran across a badger, and before the boy could get to him and make up his mind how to catch him, the badger, with his powerful forefeet had burrowed out of sight.

"Tom," called Jim, "run home and get a pick and two shovels, let us dig him out. I'll watch the hole."

"What do you want to do with him?" Tom asked.

"I'm going to tame him," Jim spoke with decision. "You needn't tell me that he isn't a real dog. I know he isn't a dog, but he eats meat like a dog, and I'll teach him to follow me."

Tom fetched the tools and the boys began to dig. They worked hard for half an hour, but the badger kept ahead of them.

"I can hear him," said Jim, wiping the sweat from his forehead; "he's going this way. Let us dig straight down here to head him off."

The boys did so but struck only an empty hole, for badger had turned in another direction.

The lads worked till they were tired out and had lost the trail.

"I guess we can't get him," Jim remarked discouraged, "I think he choked, I don't hear him.

"When we get to St. Louis I'm going to have a pup, and if father won't get me one I'll beg mother till I get one."

Thus passed May, the Planting Moon of the Sioux as well as June, the Moon of Strawberries.

On the first Saturday in July it was the turn of the men to visit the home camp.

On the Thursday preceding Benton and Hartmann were doing some repair-work on the sluices, so Brule strolled down the stream to get a deer. As he turned a corner in the

valley, he almost walked into a camp of Indians. Several horses were picketed on a patch of grass, two tepees were pitched and a big red-bearded white man lay in the shade on the bank smoking his pipe. Under the trees ten Indians were seen smoking or frying meat over a small fire. The party had evidently just made camp for the night.

"By all the smoky hills!" Brule muttered to himself, "Red Simpson! The worst character in the whole Indian country!"

He had seen enough and, as quick as possible, he made his way back to camp.

Since they had moved into North Camp, the men had been unusually watchful. Their sluices and tent were set up, in the open. They had cleared away all bushes, so it was impossible for any one to approach unseen very close to their camp; and they had kept their guns always within easy reach.

"They will surely scout up the creek tomorrow," Hartmann declared. "If they are not actually looking for our party, they will think that the stream is muddied by beavers

and they will come up to see how large the colony is."

"Well, boys," Benton decided quickly, "I think the game is up. Let us eat our supper and strike out for the home camp."

CHAPTER XXVII

TAKING BIG CHANCES

EVERYTHING that was no longer of much value and everything that was difficult to transport, the men abandoned as they broke camp.

But in spite of their hurry they took care not to betray to Red Simpson and his followers that they had left in haste. Their mining-tools they threw into a thicket, and on the camp-fire they poured a pail of water. Only the heavy sluice-boxes were left as they had been used.

Although the three men knew that they were not in danger of any attack during the night, they traveled most of the time in silence. Every man knew that the deciding event in their venture had arrived and every one was busy with his own thoughts. The chances were very good that they might lose all the

results of a year's hard labor and their lives in addition.

If Red Simpson thought he could rob them, he would do it, and then he would want to kill them to hide his crime. Those were the thoughts of each man as they rode along the dark, silent trail, paying no attention to the horses, because they knew that the animals could be depended on to take them to the home camp.

Several times a buck uttered his sharp, whistling snort at the nocturnal train that stirred him from his bed of pine needles, and a black bear, interrupted in gathering a meal of big ants, which his keen nose had discovered under a rotten log, rushed noisily into a spruce thicket with a savage, "Whoof, whoof."

From a distant ridge came faintly the wild hoot of a big owl and a small flock of screaming night-hawks followed the travelers, as if they were rather curious about the strange caravan.

In a country of lakes and rivers a traveler

at night is greeted by the song of the whip-poorwill, and the weird call of the loon, but these birds are not at home in the Black Hills.

It was in the gray dawn, the war-whoop hour of the Indian warriors, when the men knocked at the gate of their fort.

The first thought of the boys, aroused by a good deal of vigorous pounding and loud calling, was "Indians!"

"Grab your gun, Tom," Jim muttered still half-asleep, "they're after us."

"Wake up, Jim," Tom told him, as he jumped up to open the gate, "it's Father and the men."

The boys knew, of course, that the men would not have come to the fort at this hour unless something was wrong and the men had to tell all they knew about their prospective visitors.

"We lit out pretty quick," said Brule in finishing the story, "to give them no chance to ambush us on the long trail through the timber. For the present, we are quite safe

in our castle and five guns are a good deal better than three.''

''We are quite safe as long as we are in our fort,'' Benton and Hartmann agreed, ''but the question is how to get away with our furs and gold without having them dog our trail clear to the Missouri.''

''I have not the slightest doubt,'' Benton continued, ''that they are planning at this very moment to rob us. They will not openly attack us, they all love their worthless skins too much for that. They will try to steal or kill our horses and wear us out by constantly harassing us, and if they can, they will pick off one man after the other, until they have got us all.''

''We might abandon the furs and make a quick trip of it with our gold,'' Hartmann suggested.

''No, sir,'' Brule broke in, ''I worked harder for those furs than I ever did for anything else. I say they won't get them without a fight.''

"What do you think of buying them off?" Benton asked. "We might give them a bale of furs and three or four horses."

"Buy them off—that bunch of scoundrels! Never!" both Hartmann and Brule declared promptly.

"Furthermore," Hartmann added, "Red Simpson will not stay bought. He will want to get our gold. Giving him a bale of furs and some horses will only whet his greed. It will be just like giving a hungry wolf a taste of blood. No use; we can't buy them off. We must either throw them off our trail, or take a chance on fighting them, and, as I see it now, our prospects are pretty poor either way."

While Tom and Jim were getting breakfast ready for their unexpected guests, the men rounded up the horses and left them near the stockade.

After breakfast the men made everything ready for their departure. They packed the fur, dug out their gold and distributed it evenly among the five men in the party, so

that in case of any accident not all of it would be lost.

All day long they were busy devising some way out of their dangerous situation. One plan they felt quite sure would bring them out alive. They could burn everything except their gold, kill the horses they could not take with them, including Tom's colt, and make a dash for the plains. The chances were good that they had so much the start of Red Simpson that he could not overtake them.

But all five voted with an emphatic no, on this plan. They were not going to give up without a fight the result of a whole winter's work. The thought of killing their horses was revolting to them, and Tom just cried when he heard that Brownie might have to be killed, so that Benton cut the discussion short by saying, "Don't worry, my boy, we'll fight before we kill the colt."

By supper-time they had thought out a plan.

"It's a desperate game," Hartmann ex-

claimed, "but it may work. We have squeezed out of some very tight places on this trip; perhaps we can do it once more."

The men, who had not slept a wink the night before, went to bed early, while the boys were to take turns at watching. The horses had all been picketed near the stockade, so as not to take any chances of having them wander off.

"You need not fear any attack during the night," Hartmann told the boys. "It is not at all likely that they will show up on this prairie before to-morrow forenoon, but we do expect them at that time and have made our plans on that calculation."

"Yes, I feel sure that our figuring is right," Benton assented. "They took some time to examine our camp. In the afternoon they started on our trail, going carefully to avoid running into a trap. To-night they are camping somewhere half way down the trail and they will show up on this prairie some time to-morrow."

At daybreak, the last breakfast was served

in the fort, and a little after sunrise every man, except the leader, was in the saddle. He stayed a little longer to set fire to the fort and cabin, which had been home to all of them for nearly a year.

"Father, what's that for?" asked the boys, who had not been told of this part of the plan. "Don't burn our fort!"

"It's got to go, boys," Hartmann consoled them. "We want Red Simpson and his braves to follow us and not waste their valuable time on a deserted fort."

"It seems a crazy plan," Brule commented, as the party was traveling leisurely and without attempt at concealment toward Black Arrow Cave, the cave Tom and Jim had explored and which the men had also visited. "But we'll try it," he continued. "If it doesn't work, we can still fight, buy them off, or run."

"Or get killed," Hartmann added with grim humor.

Arriving at the cave, the horses were allowed to graze, while the men carried all the

goods inside and then they cut a number of trees to barricade the entrance.

"Well, boys," Benton laughed, "we have done our part. Now let us hope that the noble Simpson and the other reds will not disappoint us. We ought to see signs of them pretty soon."

Another hour passed, but no Indian was visible, but a little later Sahpa became very much excited about something in a clump of young pines, three or four hundred yards away.

The men watched Jim's pet for awhile, then Benton spoke with a smile. "Well, boys, I believe we had better move in, I think the noble reds have come."

When Sahpa noticed that men and horses were disappearing into the cave, his curiosity made him desert his perch on the pine. Jim promptly caught him and tied him to the saddle of his horse.

"You black spook," he talked to him, "I can't go after you if you get out of the cave."

The party could not take all the horses, so

the four wildest were left outside; but the men had made a very adroit use of this necessity.

Inside the cave they sat down behind the barricade of logs.

"I think Red Simpson is somewhat puzzled," Brule remarked with a chuckle.

The four horses gradually strayed away from the entrance to the cave. When they were about a quarter of a mile away, Red Simpson and half a dozen Indians came out of the woods on the hillside and tried to catch the horses.

"Benton," begged Brule, very much excited, "let me send Simpson a slug. I can drop him dead easy at this distance."

"No, no," Benton ordered, "you sit down and smoke your pipe. They are doing just what we want them to do. Let them chase the horses and they will forget about us for a while."

The horses would not be caught and gradually circled back toward the entrance of the cave. When the Indians thought they were

getting within range of the men in the cave, they withdrew into the timber.

"They will never catch the horses, unless they rope them," Benton remarked, "and now, boys," he continued, "is it not about time that we move? Tom and Jim, you might build a little smudge near the barricade, just to signal to our friends that we are still here."

While the men were getting ready, the lads built a small fire, the smoke of which curled in blue wreaths out of the cave with the gentle outdraught of air under the roof of the entrance.

"Now, Brule, before we leave, send a ball over toward our visitors just to warn them not to come too close to the entrance for a while. To-morrow or late to-night they may peep in."

Brule did as he was told and the men and horses moved down the cave as silently as they could. It was a laborious task, but they had taken the steadiest and most sure-footed animals with them. In some places the men

had to pry away a rock or knock off a projecting corner to enable the horses to pass, but the docile creatures seemed to know what was wanted of them and both men and beasts reached the closed second entrance without mishap.

Now came a half-hour of hard work and anxiety. Could they quickly widen this entrance enough to take the horses through? With pick, shovels, and hammers, they worked as they had never worked before.

One big rock at the bottom they could neither move nor split.

"We'll blast the thing out," said Benton. "It is our only chance. We must get out before dark."

He emptied his powder bag into a hole under the block; put a fuse in the powder and closed the hole as he had learned in the digging and mining operations. To deaden the sound of the explosion and to prevent danger from flying debris, he threw a big piece of canvas over the expected blast hole.

The men were moving back behind a bend

in the cave and were taking the horses with them.

"It's the only way for us to get out quick," he told the men. "The wind is in our favor and if the reds should hear a muffled sound, it will only arouse their superstition so much more. I think we have them pretty well mixed up and confused, as to our plans.

"Now look out, men, I'm going to touch her off."

The men ran to safety behind the bend, and with a dull muffled sound the powder exploded.

Benton ran forward to examine the result of his blast.

"Boys," he cried, "great luck! She is shattered to pieces. Now, quick, get the stuff out of the way."

In a few minutes the entrance was cleared. Tom and his colt were the first to pass through. Although the opening was none too large, the horses all passed through safely.

"Thank God! We are at last on the trail

for home!" Benton exclaimed. "Men and boys, you all did nobly!"

The train passed down a steep ravine which joined the dry bed of a stream running east.

When it grew dark, Benton put a lighted candle in their only lantern and walked ahead picking the trail. At midnight they halted at a water-hole in the dry bed of the stream. The men built a fire for making a midnight lunch, because no one had eaten a bite since noon, while the horses after drinking their fill, stood close by cropping the bushes.

At daylight, they started again, working their way through a canyon, where only wise and sure-footed Western horses led by experienced men could travel.

All day they traveled as steadily as the horses could stand, and at sunset they had reached the easy slopes of the foothills and camped for the night under an open grove of small pines. When they sat down to supper Benton allowed the men to give a yell.

"Yell if you feel like it," he told them

with a laugh. "Perhaps the wild beasts in the woods will enjoy your musical voices."

"Hartmann, you are a bum cook," Brule joked in high spirits as he quickly disposed of one pancake after another, "but I give you credit for being a good soldier. Your military plans worked out to a dot. Those Indians will hang around the cave for a day or two trying to catch our four horses. The old bay will work back to the cave trying to find his companion, our black mare. Red Simpson and his party will be afraid to go near the cave, because they think our leaving the four horses is a ruse to lead them within the range of our guns.

"We fooled them fine, and by the time they find it out, we shall be sixty miles away south of Sheep Mountain."

"Will they catch the horses?" Jim asked.

"No, never!" Hartmann answered emphatically, "but if they do, the animals will break away before they ever get them out of the hills. Those four horses will grow as wild as antelope."

The route which the party had taken out of the hills lay south of Minnelusa Creek and was much shorter than the route over which the little party had come about a year ago.

"I hope," said Benton, as they left the foothills going in a southeasterly direction, "that Red Simpson and his party will enjoy their stay in the hills as much as we have enjoyed ours, and I pray that we may not have to lose any more Indians."

One of Benton's wishes was fulfilled, for at the end of a week the party reached the trading-house at the mouth of the Big Sioux without having seen either white men or Indians.

Red Simpson and his Indians were much disgusted, when after two days, one of them crawled carefully up to the cave and found the place deserted.

"They were bad spirits of the mountains," the Indians said, "and have gone back into the earth."

"You are a lot of superstitious fools and

cowards,'' Simpson spoke out in anger. ''They are in the cave with their gold and I'll drive them out alone.''

He did go in, but the silence and the utter darkness ahead of him unnerved him. He began to think that any moment he might feel a bullet under his ribs and his cowardice caused him to turn back before he could see the second entrance.

The Indians tried to rope the four abandoned horses of Benton's party, but these animals were in such fine condition that the half-starved Indian ponies could not overtake them.

Red Simpson and his Indians did, of course, discover the burnt fort and were again much disgusted when they found nothing of value.

The power of law and courts whose absence from the Indian country Benton had deplored was not needed to mete out justice to Red Simpson. He never returned from his trip into the Black Hills, and for a long time it was not known what had become of

him. Many years after the event, one of the Indians revealed the story.

The white renegade had promised his outlaw followers great booty, if they would go with him after the white miners. When all their plans miscarried, the Indians felt very ugly toward their leader, who blamed them for the failure of his war party.

"You are a pack of cowards," he upbraided them, when it became evident that in some mysterious way the miners had escaped their clutches and would not be starved out. "You should have rushed upon them and killed them all, as I told you, before they went into the cave."

"But they had guns and were watching," the Indians replied.

"What if they had!" Simpson roared, "if you weren't a lot of dirty cowards you wouldn't be afraid of getting hurt!

"You are all women, you are squaws. If you were men you would not let me go alone into the cave. They're in there now with their gold."

But the Indians would not go in. "If the men who went into the cave are real men," they said, "they will be there to-morrow, and if they leave, we can follow their trail. We must first gather many fat pine knots for candles so that we do not lose our way in the big hole." To much more abusive language of Red Simpson the Indians made no reply. In the evening, at the camp-fire, all engaged in a gambling game and, when they caught Red Simpson cheating, they killed him.

The three Indians who had met the Benton party in the Bad Lands and followed them into Minnelusa Canyon firmly believed that the white men, who had three times eluded them, possessed some supernatural power.

"We lost them in a great storm in the Bad Lands and they left no trail," they told the other outlaws. "They are not afraid of thunder and they do not fear the big dark graves in the rocks. They can make themselves and their horses into spirits, so they cannot be seen and make no tracks.

"We will not follow them again."

Thus the belief of the Indians that the Black Hills were the abode of bad spirits was more firmly established than ever.

The Benton party went from the Big Sioux to St. Louis by steamer taking their horses with them on the boats. "We'll keep them all as long as they live," the men declared, "and when they get old they will not have to work."

Little Peter was very much afraid of his father, until Benton had his black beard shaved off.

Tankaheeta married a Cheyenne woman and lived with that tribe and thus did not take part in the long and bloody wars between the Sioux and the whites.

The first time he came down to St. Louis Benton bought him a good gun and three horses and the boys told him all about their adventures in the mountains.

Mrs. Benton would hardly have recognized Tom and Jim, if she had met them unexpectedly on the streets of St. Louis.

"How big and brown you boys have

grown," she exclaimed. "I am afraid you will never be white again."

"Oh, yes, we shall," the lads cried laughing. "Just let us sleep in a room and eat your white bread for a while and you'll see."

When a few days later she deplored the fact that her big boys had never been to school, Benton consoled her, saying, "Don't worry, Mother, they will catch up. They have learned a thousand things which books and schools cannot teach, which boys can learn only in camp and in the mountains."

Next spring every boy in the neighborhood of the Bentons tried to tame a crow, but none of the fledgelings grew as wise as Sahpa of the Black Hills. Tom's colt also was the envy of many a boy, and whenever Tom and Jim were seen on their horses that had been in a fight with a panther, they could gather a group of boys around them who discussed the scars on the horses and listened with big eyes to the stories of the strange Bad Lands and of the wonderful Black Hills.

All other stories the boys told freely, but of

the gold they found, neither men nor boys ever said a word until the Black Hills were thrown open to white people many years later.

Benton and his men, as well as the boys, when they were old enough engaged in the steamboat business between St. Louis and St. Paul, and all became well-known river men; but none ever went back to the Indian country on the Missouri.

THE END

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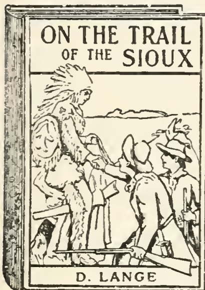

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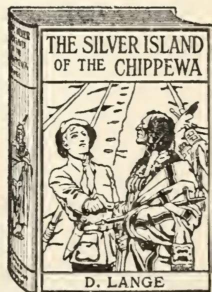

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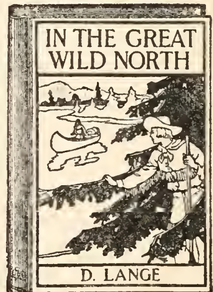

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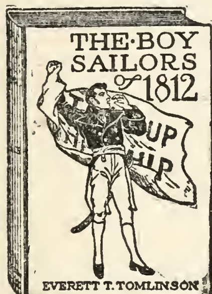

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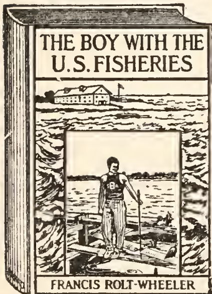

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